

Chapter Four -- Building Readiness for Change

It was 1979. The 22 year-old elder was invited to be the convener of a new congregational committee for church growth. That was a pretty new idea back then, but the young man agreed readily as he saw it to be an important goal for the congregation's future. The new committee members were equally enthusiastic as they set to the work of learning about this new ministry discipline. Over the months this group came to understand a congregation's need for a church growth orientation as well as the principles and practices. Slowly they began to develop a strategy that would fit their own congregation. Finally, after about five months worth of work, the committee made its very first presentation to the Session (the congregation's leadership body). At the conclusion the young elder asked for questions, but heard only silence. Finally one lonely question was asked, "Why would we be interested in church growth when we are one of the largest congregations in our denomination?" The continuing silence suggested that this was the same question on the minds of the other church elders. The proposals went nowhere, and within two months the church growth committee faded out of existence. Two decades later the congregation was half its former size with a church school one-third its former size.

I was that 22 year-old elder, and I was angry, disappointed and disillusioned. It wasn't until years later that I appreciated our naiveté in presenting our proposals without first preparing our Session for them. Those on the Session had not shared the five month journey of learning the committee had enjoyed together. The elders assumed that the current numeric strength of the congregation would simply continue as it always had. They did not appreciate, as the committee had come to learn, the impact of societal change on the congregation. Our church was content with its current success and saw no reason to make changes. Our committee assumed like many in leadership that "the right idea will always win" and all we needed to do was provide a logical plan that (we assumed) people would see, understand, appreciate and accept at face value. What we didn't appreciate then was that this leadership body, and the church they served, did not have sufficient "readiness for change" to simply pick up and do what we had proposed. In fact, what we were proposing was a significant shift in the congregation's mindset and practices. Our committee had no idea how much preliminary work was really needed to prepare people to hear and understand the "right idea" as being the right idea, and to hold the perspective that would motivate them in a desire to act.

But our congregation was not alone as an organization then, or even today. The concept of "readiness for change" is relatively new. The first landmark academic article on this topic was written only in 1993 (Armenakis et. al., 1993). Before that time, and still significantly since, leaders have been primarily focused on "resistance to change": a concept born in 1948 and fully matured and accepted in management thinking by 1960 (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). Over the past fifteen years, however, there has been a growing realization that a significant cause for resistance to change is the organization's lack of readiness. Consequently, readiness for change has become a vital step on the

path of motivation. Here is one example description of how change happens, rooted in the work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin:

“Successful implementation of organizational changes generally proceeds through three stages: readiness, adoption, and institutionalization. *Readiness* occurs when the environment, structure, and organizational members’ attitudes are such that they are receptive to a forthcoming change. *Adoption* occurs when the organizational members temporarily alter their attitudes and behaviors to conform to the expectations of the change. *Institutionalization* occurs when the change becomes a stable part of organization’s behavior” (Holt et. al., 2007).

Readiness is like plowing before planting: it prepares the soil to best receive the seed of a new idea. It is a condition of congregational life in relation to change, and thus is open to change itself. Effort can be put towards preparing a congregation in multi-faceted ways so people are more open to change, able to hear and appreciate new initiatives, and have the attitude, time and resources to give new ideas good consideration. In this way leaders create the best possible context for the most number of people to make the greatest commitment to a new direction. While readiness is not the opposite of resistance, the greater the readiness the less the potential resistance there will be. Leaders can seek to prepare a congregation in a number of different ways:

- by improving people’s understanding of the environment of their congregation (their local community, their society’s culture);
- by reducing congregational worries or issues that could distract from a new initiative;
- by modifying the governance habits of the congregation’s leadership body to free up time and focus to dwell on the new ideas;
- by encouraging a growing appreciation for Christ’s callings to the Church, the aspirations of the congregation, and / or the problems before it;
- by helping leaders grow in their sense of their role and responsibilities;
- by helping people appreciate their place in the congregation’s history and that they, like their fore bearers, are stewards of the future of their congregation;
- by thoroughly preparing the congregation in advance for specific initiatives;
- and so on.

Readiness for change also provides an excellent frame of mind to move leaders away from the “us vs. them” mentality that expects resistance. It is ingrained in the assumptions of many congregations that “church folk do not like change”. When you actually look at that assumption you quickly realize that it is substantially untrue. Congregations love many kinds of change: reduced conflict, increased givings, better sermons, swelling memberships, active youth groups, and so on. Who would resist such changes in their church? Congregations tend to want the positive outcomes from such change. However, many church folk can:

- become anxious about the uncertainty of the transition period from the current way to the new way,
- feel threatened by what they interpret will be the personal costs to them in order to make the new initiatives happen,
- resist the loss of some meaningful element of the current life of the church even if that means something else will become meaningful in its place.

While we like many potential outcomes, we are hesitant about the path to get there. General readiness for change prepares the hearts and minds of congregants to not only welcome new goals but also to be prepared for the journey to the goals' achievement. An approach to strengthen readiness, then, does not start with the assumption that there are those who will be in favour of change and those who will not. People will tend to be in favour of the proposed outcomes. Rather, it begins with the assumption that within this one congregation there are a whole range of characteristics and feelings that will promote and inhibit change. The need, then, becomes helping this one body be as prepared as possible to consider the possibility of change.

Readiness comes through three successive stages. Each one prepares the ground for the next to follow:

General Readiness: preparing the congregation's overall climate for change

Specific Readiness: preparing the congregation for specific new initiatives

The Preparation and Presentation of the Change Message (which is covered in the following chapter as a separate topic)

Building General Readiness for Change

Most planning models can be reduced to the following formula:

- assess your current reality
- determine your goal
- plan the way from one to the other.

To use a space travel analogy, the earth can be the starting point to reach for the moon with the rocket as the way to get there. However, this approach will fail for lack of a launching pad. Building general readiness for change is like building a launching pad for new initiatives. Those considering significant change in their congregation should heed the wisdom of Ogden Nash: "You can't get there from here". But you can build the place to leave from. That is general readiness.

Regardless of the nature of any specific initiative your congregation may want to pursue, the overall motivational climate of the congregation needs to be ready to imagine, consider, choose and implement it. This means that congregational leaders can begin to strengthen general readiness for change long before any new initiatives are even conceived. In fact, improving the general readiness for change will help produce a

congregational attitude where this kind of discussion can happen. Consequently it is a good practice to begin on this aspect of the motivational climate of your congregation well before your leadership puts discerning the future on the agenda.

The overall climate for change in any particular congregation is unique. An important role of church leaders is to analyze the congregation's climate through the lens of readiness for change. You can determine:

- what characteristics of the congregation already reflect its readiness for change?
- what characteristics do not?
- of those that do, which ones can be built on most effectively?
- of those that do not, which ones if addressed will create the greatest leverage for change?

What characteristics, by their presence or absence, can provide this base level of motivation for general readiness? On the following page is a general readiness for change audit questionnaire that lists many of the most important ones. The questionnaire is a collection of positive statements that can help you assess your congregation's general motivational climate. The more statements that you can affirm as being true for your congregation the greater your confidence can be that the basic launching pad for considering the future is ready. You can conduct this evaluation yourself as you think about strengthening the motivational climate of your congregation. This tool can be even more helpful if it is used together by your congregation's leadership body. Each person can complete this assessment tool individually and then the leadership group can share their insights with each other. As the group works through the different statements, some will be unanimously affirmed as being true or untrue for your church. These represent the aspects of your congregation's life that you know will promote or inhibit change. Rich discussion can happen where there is a disagreement over particular statements which can lead to a deeper mutual understanding about your church.

How Ready Are We To Think About Our Future?

A congregation's ability to freely and confidently think about its future is enhanced when the overall feeling in the congregation is positive. This survey asks you to let us know what you think our readiness is in different aspects of our church life. The statements are all positive. If you think a statement is true for our church, indicate to the left of the statement how strong that quality is. If you think the statement is not true for us, indicate how strong that is for us on the right side. Mark the appropriate square with an "X". If you do not know, or think a statement is neither true nor untrue for us, please leave it blank. You may think that a statement is both true and untrue at the same time. In this case, consider the overall balance in the church and whether the statement leans more one way or the other. What we wish to know is whether the condition in the readiness statement will generally help or hinder us.

Statement is True for Us		Readiness Statement	Statement is Not True for Us	
Very True	Some what	The congregation is generally open to change and will not be anxious about it.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation has a positive history of effectively implementing new ideas.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation is able to take risks.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	There are no old scars that may again become open wounds if the congregation begins to consider its future.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation has the core confidence it needs to do new things.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation has the flexibility in its ways needed to bring new ideas to life.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation is capable of living with the stress of making change.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation thinks more in terms of mission rather than the maintenance of the status quo.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation thinks more in terms of serving others rather than serving itself.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation focuses more on its future rather than on today or yesterday.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation has a faith foundation that is a strong motivator for new initiatives.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The culture of the congregation permits and enables change.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation is very aware of the changing nature of our society, and that awareness in turn helps shape the congregation's ministry and mission.	Some what	Quite Untrue

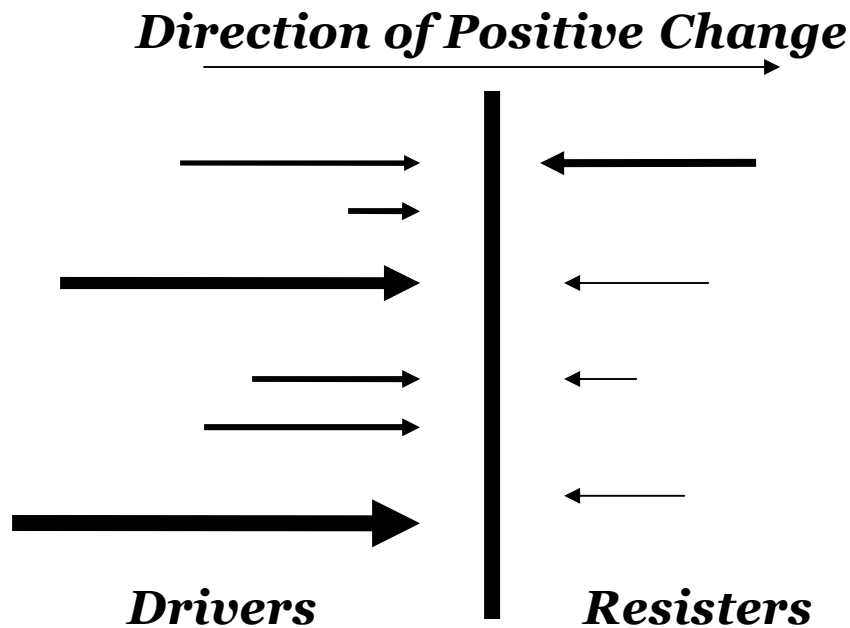
Statement is True for Us		Readiness Statement	Statement is Not True for Us	
Very True	Some what	The congregation's current level of satisfaction, loyalty, commitment and happiness will support change.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	There are no pockets of negativity among the people of the congregation.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation is able to have an honest, thoughtful and helpful discussion around new ideas and initiatives.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	People who disagree are able to engage others in discussion with their ideas in an open and healthy way.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation is free of distracting conflict.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	When a decision is made, the congregation is all able to rally behind it.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	Those who are looked up to in our church are known to support new initiatives that have been formally approved by the congregation and / or its leadership.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	There are no turf issues that could become a problem.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very	Some what	People in the church generally believe that the congregation is managed well.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation trusts its leaders.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	Church leaders are prepared to consider the congregation's future and are able to commit to adopted goals.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The leadership is able to carry the stress of making a planned future happen.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation has a positive history of being effective in achieving goals.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The governance structures and rules will help us achieve new goals.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation's habits for making decisions and implementing plans will help take a new initiative from goal to reality.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation has adequate resources in terms of finances and active people to engage in change.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The congregation believes that it can do whatever it sets its mind to.	Some what	Quite Untrue
Very True	Some what	The general mood of the congregation overall is positive.	Some what	Quite Untrue

As you can see from this checklist, there is a great range of characteristics in the life of your congregation that can strengthen and weaken readiness. Once your leadership group has made its assessment, it should naturally move to consider how to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses. In the congregation I currently serve we spent over four years working on many of these characteristics. While that may seem like a long time, it is truly an investment that pays significant dividends by way of imagination, energy, excitement and confidence that congregants will have when it comes to the dreaming and planning stage.

Using Force Field Analysis to Understand Your Congregation's Readiness for Change

Another helpful tool to gauge readiness for change in your congregation is Force Field Analysis. This is a very simple method developed by Kurt Lewin, who is considered by many to be the father of social psychology. This theory should help you better appreciate why the characteristics given above can be so important.

Lewin proposed that at any particular point in time an individual or a group of people have a "life space". This includes the group's character: its ideals, goals, values, norms of behaviour, needs, moods, relationships, anxieties, motivations and such. The life space also includes the environment which is the social setting the group finds itself in. In the case of a church, the environment is the community that the congregation is located in as well as society's culture. The group's behaviour at any particular moment is a consequence of these two elements of life space working together. Life space will have an impact on any change initiative. Some of its elements may help promote change (which Lewin called "drivers", represented by True statements in the readiness questionnaire above) while others might hinder change (which he called "resisters", represented by Untrue statements in the readiness questionnaire). The net combination of resisters tends to hold the net combination of drivers in check, thus maintaining homeostasis in the group. Positive change occurs when the drivers become stronger and / or the resisters are diminished. When the balance is changed the homeostasis is lost, and the system of the organization shifts to a new balance. This can be represented in the following diagram. In the illustrated case, the Drivers are more numerous and have a greater strength than the Resisters. Consequently change should occur.



Today we would say that this is a systems approach to change as it recognizes that there are a multitude of influences for and against any change initiative. Change any one factor in the system and this will cause a subsequent impact on the whole system. Readiness for change increases when any of the Drivers are strengthened or any of the Resisters are dampened. In light of this, look again at the questionnaire above. If it is true, for example, that the congregation views its leaders as capable, able to support the congregation through the stress of change, as being good managers, and as being “up for the job”, this high level of trust will be a strong driver for positive change. In contrast, if it is true that the congregation has a low confidence level in its abilities, gets easily mired down in endless debate, and holds a poor self-image, then you may have conditions that resist change.

The church leadership can utilize force field analysis and the items on the readiness questionnaire to help gauge the general readiness for change in your congregation.

- 1] On sheets of newsprint, set up two columns. Entitle them “Drivers” and “Resisters”.
- 2] Brainstorm as many as you can think of under their appropriate heading.
- 3] Rank them for the degree of their influence: weak, medium or strong.

<i>DRIVERS</i>	<i>RESISTERS</i>
■ ~~~~~	■ ~~~~~
■ ~~~~~	■ ~~~~~
■ ~~~~~	■ ~~~~~
■ ~~~~~	■ ~~~~~
■ ~~~~~	■ ~~~~~
	■ ~~~~~
	■ ~~~~~
	■ ~~~~~

- 4] For the Drivers, consider [a] which ones will provide the greatest possible leverage for positive change (these are ones you want to capitalize on), and [b] which Drivers can be strengthened?
- 5] For the Resisters, consider [a] which ones exert the greatest force (these are the ones you want to give significant attention to), and [b] which Resisters can be diminished?
- 6] Based on your assessments, build your plan to improve the general readiness for change by acting on your assessments made in [4] and [5] above.

One Congregation's Story of Addressing General Readiness for Change

Just before I arrived at St. Andrew's Church in 2000 they had made a significant decision: to proceed with a proposed \$1.2 million facility expansion. I arrived that fall ready to go with fundraising and construction. In my first months there, however, I quickly began to learn something unexpected about my new congregation. While the 120 people who attended the congregational meeting were substantially in favour of the building program, I came to learn that the actual majority of people in this large congregation were not in favour. 80% of the congregation, after all, did not attend that crucial meeting. With this new appreciation I began consciously and gently to inquire into the reasons why so many were not keen for this project. Kurt Lewin wrote "If you want to truly understand something, try to change it". The passing of the building proposal was, in effect, a proposed change. True to Lewin's maxim it was easy to discover several Resisters.

I led our planning team for the building program through an assessment of our general readiness for change using Lewin's Force Field Analysis. This team easily came up with all the important Drivers for the building program. After all, they were driving the program! We gave particular attention to the Resisters, of which some were obvious while others were more subtle. In all we came up with 19 different Resisters for the project. Some of them were:

Deficit Budgets: The congregation was just completing its fourth consecutive year of running a deficit and was planning a deficit budget for the current year. The influence here was obvious and significant. Many people were saying "If we can't afford to pay all our bills, how will we possibly be able to pay off a mortgage as well?"

Accumulated Debt: Four years of deficit financing had left the congregation with a \$50,000 accumulated debt that was tracking for further growth rather than reduction. Again, the mortgage argument presented itself: "If we can't pay off this small debt, why would we take on another substantial one?"

Multiple Expensive Goals: At this time the congregation was also talking about adding an additional minister to the staff. The annual expense for this additional staff person

would be equivalent to the annual mortgage costs. Many thought attempting both concurrently was unrealistic.

Congregational Controversies: there were a few controversies existing in the congregation that were adding “background noise” to the building project. These were inadvertent diversions that were dislocating focus away from the building program.

“Unprotected” Designated Funds: The congregational leadership managed the accumulated debt by making the reasonable decision to borrow first from ourselves before borrowing from the bank. This meant that any designated monies set aside for specific purposes (including money already given to the building fund) were not actually in the bank – that cash was loaned out to the church for operational expenses. While this saved interest payments on the debt, on the one hand, it diminished the sense of trust among many members. In their minds designated funds were to be held secure for the designated purpose, even if that meant we had to pay interest on our debt. If members were to give for a building campaign they wanted to be sure the money was set aside and saved for that purpose. This trust and management issue had to be addressed.

Insufficient Urgency: The majority of the congregation was fairly content with the state of the facility as it was. Many people would not feel a personal impact from much of the proposed building changes. There were aspects of the project – adding an elevator and upgrading the kitchen – that were seen as vital and urgent. For many people doing those two things alone would be sufficient.

Congregational Self-Esteem was not very strong. Consequently there were a number of pessimistic views on the future life of the church: “We are an older congregation that can’t attract young families”... “Too many of our seniors are on fixed incomes and will not be able to give to a building campaign”... “The construction work will cause too many disruptions to congregational life”... These views, in turn, also tended to foster a view that the congregation would not be able to manage a large debt. The congregation needed something to provide evidence that the church was capable of holding successful financial campaigns and paying down debt.

Pessimism about Completion: Some were of the view that the congregation was more about talk than action. Their sense was that proposals took a long time to implement, if they were achieved at all. Again, this was, for some, an issue of trust with regards to congregational leadership.

As you can see, many of the conditions were not actually about the building program directly, and those conditions exerted significant “resisting” force against the project moving forward. In this analysis the leadership team for the build also learned something about the Drivers. There were many people in our congregation who were unconvinced regarding the real need for the renovation and expansion. In order to move ahead with the build we had to strengthen the rationale for the project to provide more compelling evidence that the project was needed.

Having made this assessment, we decided to let talk of the building program disappear for 18 months. It was agreed that in that time period we would attempt to address as many of the identified issues as we could. As one member of the committee put it, “We want our efforts to be so successful around the Drivers and Resisters that the next time the congregation holds a meeting to discuss the build, when someone stands up to criticize it, they will discover that they have nothing to say”. Eighteen months later we had achieved the following:

Balanced Budget: by showing fiscal responsibility we were defusing the criticisms around our inability to pay the bills. This, in turn, helped to bolster confidence in our leadership.

Success in a Small Financial Campaign: We ran a successful “Miracle Month” campaign to raise \$125,000 to install the elevator right away and to pay off the accumulated debt. Through this single project alone we:

- quickly met one of our pressing needs (an elevator) in a timely and professional way. This reduced the pessimism about completing projects.
- We paid off our accumulated debt, creating the evidence that the congregation did have the capacity to pay down a mortgage.
- We demonstrated our capacity to raise funds. People were surprised and pleased by the quick success of the campaign, which strengthened the congregation’s confidence in our ability to do something bigger.
- This had the consequence of strengthening congregational efficacy (that is, the congregation’s belief that it was capable of achieving what it set its mind to). The “small victory” was the beginning of a snowball effect in our congregation’s life, providing some initial momentum for the significant capital campaign to come.

Protecting Designated Funds: The funds we had borrowed from ourselves were repaid and placed in a new, separate savings account. These were now left untouched except for the purposes they were given for. This strengthened trust in our leadership.

Setting Priorities: The Session agreed to give priority to the facility expansion rather than increased staffing. This helped make our plans appear more realistic, which again strengthened congregational trust in our leadership.

Controversies were dealt with, which in turn switched off the background noise that was a distraction to the building program.

The leadership for the build addressed the Drivers as well:

Strengthened the Rationale: the building team looked closely at the reasons for the build. They carefully crafted their message about the need for the build in a way that spoke to a greater proportion of the congregation.

Leadership: One of the most respected and most effective congregational leaders agreed to chair the building effort. He was also a chartered accountant with a cautious

nature. His appointment alone increased significantly the congregation's trust that the project would be well managed.

Linking the Story of the Expansion into our Congregation's Story: We began to tell and tell again the story of our congregation. On three occasions in our history the people of St. Andrew's made significant, costly decisions regarding its future. All three decisions created very positive outcomes for this congregation. All three were highly significant in creating the congregation that today's members appreciated and enjoyed. We then shared how this build would become another one of these significant historic moments... again doing something significant for the sake of the congregation that will follow us. Telling our history in a way that put this building proposal into historic perspective helped. By enhancing our appreciation that we are stewards of the congregation's future in continuity with our past we built a more positive climate for change.

Increased Sense of Urgency: While we were improving our readiness for change the cost of construction was escalating in our city. Inflation was adding \$100,000 a year to the project. Communicating this reality to the congregation increased our sense of urgency to proceed. This became a new important Driver.

The congregation widely embraced the building proposal the next time it officially came up for discussion. The leadership team went on to exceed the set goal for the capital campaign and the construction started on our new schedule on time. The successful completion of the project, on budget, in turn strengthened our congregation's sense of self-efficacy and its trust in our leadership. This, in turn, also added to the "snow ball effect" that built our sense of capacity to do something new. Overall, the congregation's self-esteem improved. In all, the motivational climate of the congregation was strengthened.

During the preparation for the build and during the construction period our congregation's leadership was also enhancing other aspects of general readiness for change. These included:

- Committees were empowered to have more authority over their area of ministry. This, in turn, reduced the time needed by the Session (the congregation's leadership body) to manage the congregation. The time for the regular business of Session was reduced to 50 minutes. This provided a 45 minute block of time each month for the Session to engage in learning and / or big-picture thinking. In other words, we created the time needed on our agenda to express leadership.
- New elders were added to the Session. The main criteria used in choosing who to invite to serve was whether the person had a forward-looking attitude and gifts for leadership. These newcomers came to comprise half the Session.
- The congregation's attitude was shifted from permission-withholding to permission-giving when it came to emergent initiatives in church life.

- Education of the Session developed a greater awareness of the impact of cultural change on congregations today, and how different congregations are responding to societal change.
- A one night workshop on the impact the changing society is having on the Church was repeated six times for congregational members. Similar observations were also added regularly to sermons.

A large number of diverse interventions were engaged in over this four year period to improve general readiness for change. At this point the Session completed the “*How Ready Are We To Think About Our Future?*” questionnaire. While it could not affirm everything statement in the audit as being true for us, the general consensus was that we were in a very positive position to begin to consider our calling of God for our future.

As this illustration demonstrates, general readiness for change is mostly about building the efficacy beliefs of the congregation. As explained in chapter two, efficacy is the congregation’s belief in itself that it does have the will and capacity to achieve its goals. The specific actions taken in the life of St. Andrew’s created the positive evidence that this capacity did exist, which in turn strengthened the congregation’s belief in its abilities. The study of motivation has made it very clear that one of the most effective ways to build motivation to achieve goals is to focus on the efficacy beliefs of individuals as well as the organization as a whole. Working at improving general readiness will do this.

Specific Readiness for Change

Strengthening the congregation’s climate to have a stronger general motivational climate is one crucial step in preparation for change. However, a different kind of strengthening work needs to be done relative to an actual plan for the future. In this way leaders continue to build the launching pad for change. Specific readiness for change focuses on the motivational factors that will cause a congregation to proceed with proposed initiatives. Motivational issues need to be considered at two different places in the process of developing goals for a congregation’s future. The first is in the planning process. There are many things leaders can do to ensure the planning process itself will strengthen motivation for the end results of the process. The second place leaders need to consider specific readiness is before the congregation is asked to formally approve the new goals. Leaders need to assess the strength of the congregation’s willingness to proceed and determine what the leaders can do to improve this willingness to ensure the strongest endorsement of the goals possible.

Strengthening Motivation through the Planning Process

Holt, Armenakis, Harris and Feild (2007) conducted an extensive review of 45 different questionnaires designed to measure readiness and found that there appears to be four basic areas of concern in building specific readiness. These should be kept in mind by

congregational leaders from the very beginning of any process of envisioning a future as this will help leaders:

- to maintain a motivation-oriented focus on the congregation they wish to lead,
- to shape the planning process itself,
- to add motivational elements to the vision as it is developed.

1] The Change Content. This has to do with “what” is involved in the proposed initiatives. The more people appreciate the importance of the goal, the appropriate fit with their current reality, their ability to achieve it and the acceptability of the cost, the more they will feel motivated to pursue the goal. But the trap any church leader can fall easily into is the belief that the final vision, direction or goals will be sufficiently self-evident and compelling that it will sell itself in the congregation. This was our failing in the story about the church growth committee. Rather, any planning group for change should have two parallel goals: 1] the formulation of a new direction for the congregation, and 2] strengthening the motivational climate of the congregation further through [1]. This means that the leadership always needs to keep motivation in mind as they take their congregation through some process of conceiving its future. As you build the vision of the congregation’s future, the leadership should address the following concerns:

- **Idea:** are there sufficient widely-held motives within the congregation that will encourage it to commit to this vision? What motives need to be recognized or strengthened? Leaders need to create not only the vision but the rationale for it and the appeal of it. This becomes the central content of the Change Message. Since the presentation of the vision to the congregation in motivational terms will be pivotal to success, the leadership needs to be thinking about how they will build the Change Message as the planning process proceeds. This will be the focus of chapter five.
- **Benefits:** what are the perceived benefits of making the proposed changes? While we may like to think the Church is to be pretty virtuous, doing things selflessly in God’s service, studies consistently show that one of the strongest human motivations is “what’s in it for me?” The more the benefit is seen as outweighing the cost, the greater the desire will be to proceed.
- **Ability:** does the church have the organizational capability and resources (by way of people, finances and time) to make the proposed changes? If not, the vision has to include achievable plans to build that ability. The more convinced the congregation is that it is capable the stronger the corporate efficacy will be, leading to stronger motivation towards acceptance and implementation.
- **Cost:** what is it going to take to turn this vision into reality? While the congregation may have the ability it may not have the will because the perceived cost of change is too high. Will the people have to increase their financial support? Will it take more of their time and effort? Will they have to make room for new people? Does it mean the loss of something they value

now? The costs of change have to be addressed openly and honestly, but kept in the context of the vision for the future. This will be explored further in chapter seven.

- **Beliefs:** are the proposals consistent with the existing beliefs, values and theological orientation of the congregation? The more the proposals call for deviation from these elements in the congregation's current culture, the less acceptance of the change there will be. Where the beliefs align well with the vision, these beliefs need to be articulated in the Change Message. Where they do not, the leadership has to consider two possible courses of action. One route is to educate the congregation as a part of the planning process to help them learn, hold and value more strongly the new, needed beliefs. If this is too big a job to do through the planning process, then the leadership might consider making one long-range goal the strengthening of that belief within the church.
- **Importance:** do congregants generally believe that the proposed change is necessary? There are several sources of one's sense of importance, including: threats to the congregation's future well-being, strong convictions regarding what a church should be, the congregation's self-esteem, and the degree of benefit the proposed changes will bring. The greater the sense of importance conveyed by the planning process the stronger the motivation.

2] The Change Process. "How" the vision is developed will also strengthen or diminish the congregation's sense of motivation. This has to do with how the leadership will go about conceiving and implementing planned change. The motivational concerns of process try to address several needs the congregation will have as they consider their future and begin to implement a desired direction:

- Congregants need to trust those leading the process of planning and change. Thinking about change is threatening to people as it can foster fear that something they value may be lost. Also, proposed change implies that the congregation will be going somewhere they have never been before. This creates uncertainty and anxiety for people about their future. The trust people have for those leading the process helps people to cope with these feelings. The stronger their sense of trust, the freer congregants will feel to consider different directions for their future. They will also have more confidence to step out into the unknown of making that vision a reality.
- Congregants need to see their leadership being supportive of both the planning process and of the final proposals. This unanimity of support must be seen among the people leading the planning process, but also in the congregation's official leadership body. Studies seem to indicate that it is especially important that the pastor(s) be seen as supporting the process and the proposals. People read the unanimity of support as a sign that what is happening is both right and good, and that in turn strengthens trust.
- Congregants need to feel assured that they will be supported by their leaders as they enter this uncertain time of change.

- Congregants need to believe that both planning and implementation will be managed well.
- Congregants need to believe that they have an opportunity to participate in the planning process. They need to believe that their concerns will be heard, appreciated and responded to.
- Congregants need communications that is clear, comprehensive and regular.

These factors all, in some way, speak of the need for trust. Trust is the currency of leadership. Trust is important because change always breeds feelings of insecurity. Leaders are called to help shoulder the insecurity of the led: to help people feel less anxious about the new directions and more confident about their journey to the future.

An example. The leadership of one congregation in Ontario recognized that it was time to consider an addition and renovations to the church facilities. They created a building committee of congregational members who were design and construction experts. The committee also included a few “experts” on the life of the congregation, including the Senior Pastor. This group worked in isolation for about a year to develop a practical and financially realistic proposal for the facility that would truly meet the congregation’s needs. When the schematic diagrams of the new facility were revealed, the design team was universally met with the question “Where did this come from?” Even though the plan was almost perfect in every way, the congregation overwhelmingly rejected it substantially because they were not involved in the process. While this lesson can seem so obvious to us, the real learning for this congregation came through the following years. This building committee licked its wounds and began anew through a very open, participatory process. The congregation, however, was not receptive to the new initiative. Their sense of trust in the leadership had already been diminished. There was a high level of skepticism among people as they wondered whether the new open process was simply window-dressing and whether the “experts” on the committee were simply going to re-present their original ideas with some minor modifications. In the end a renewing of the planning process took laying the project aside for a few years, changing the majority of members on the committee, naming a new committee convenor and the moving on of their pastor. In the meantime, however, it meant that the recognized facility needs of the congregation remained unmet for a six year period. In every way the Change Content was fine. Six years were wasted, however, because the motivational concerns of process were not considered. Trust, which can take significant time to build, can be lost so very quickly.

3] The Change Context. This has to do with being mindful of “where” the proposed changes will occur. Aspects of the congregation’s nature, heritage and setting in the wider community can all have an impact on its motivational base as the congregation begins to envision its future. Some of these contextual factors are:

- Motivational Climate: How is the congregation’s general readiness for change? Is it strong enough to add to the motivational base of the church?
- Relationship Context: Will the relational patterns of people in your congregation facilitate or inhibit consideration of the future? Churches have

many patterns of interaction, such as: the habits of governance, the communication methods (formal and informal), power relationships, the perception of management effectiveness, the proportion of very involved vs. marginally involved congregants, the presence and practices around conflict, the willingness of the congregation to hold conversations about differences among members, and so on. The healthier the patterns of relationship within your church the more motivation there will be.

- Cultural Context: Every congregation is unique in its beliefs, values and norms of behaviour. The culture may be “tight” (very strong and uniform) or “loose”. The culture of a congregation is always far more complex than we might presume. Consequently it can be very hard to fully understand. Change leaders should spend some time considering how your congregation’s unique culture will promote and inhibit change. It is good to begin this kind of reflection with the assumption that the congregation’s culture will really promote and inhibit change simultaneously to different degrees. People who have studied churches as systems have also helped us appreciate that asking a congregation to think about its future is in fact an intervention in the status quo of the congregation. Consequently, a process to envision the future may activate aspects of your congregation’s culture that you were previously unaware of. Watch for this.

One pastor had been serving his small, traditional rural congregation for seven years. The members liked and respected him, and perceived him as being thoughtful, caring and effective. After seven years of the same thing in congregational life, year after year, he began to get restless for some new things. One Sunday in his sermon he introduced the idea that the congregation should consider its future and dream about new ways of being a church. In the church hall after worship, it appeared to the pastor that everyone was looking sheepishly back and forth between him and one gentleman. The minister knew this man as a quiet, unassuming fellow who hardly contributed to the comings and goings of church life. The man approached the minister and said only one word: “no”. The bystanders got the message as well, and nothing happened. Through seven years the minister had not become aware that this unassuming fellow was viewed by all as the congregation’s sage, and that his wisdom was the final word on all things new. As Kurt Lewin wrote sixty years ago, “If you want to understand your organization, try to change something”.

- Historic Context: Anyone who has spent any time in a church comes to realize the importance of history and tradition in shaping present attitudes and habits. These may actually be able to support the congregation as it reflects on its future. What moments from the past may you be able to build on? Are there current traditions that can help the congregation think about its future and commit to it? What, on the other hand, might work against the planning process, and of which you should be mindful? Can you mitigate against its influence? More will be said on this in chapter five.

- **Circumstances:** What has been mentioned so far provides the general context in which the congregation will consider its future. However, there will also be the specific circumstances of the moment that can help drive or inhibit discussions. For example, I worked with one congregation that saw itself in a crisis because one of its families had to relocate to a different city. This was a crisis since this one family provided 12% of the congregation's total income. This congregation invited me in as a consultant to help them deal with the crisis. I persuaded them that the crisis was not imminent and to use their sense of urgency to broadly think about the kind of church they may want to be in the future. In this way they could determine their future rather than having finances determine it for them. They heartedly agreed. Over the next six weeks we made positive progress towards what they were calling their "roadmap to the future". Then they got the surprising word that this pivotal family was returning. Instantly all interest in imagining the future dried up. The circumstances had changed. Leaders entering a process of envisioning a future should spend some time considering the influence the congregation's current circumstances. Could some of the realities of the current circumstances be motives to encourage the visioning process, or impede it? The wisdom of my experience here is that one should never assume that the current circumstances will remain the same. To help motivate change, congregational leaders should appreciate and build on as broad a spectrum of circumstance as it can.
- **Timing:** This is an extension of the current circumstances. When the congregation feels that "the timing is right" you have the greatest impulse to act. This happens when there is a convergence of contextual factors combined with opportunity which set the stage for addressing the future.

4] The People Engaging Change. Leaders have to consider "who" will be involved in a new initiative – both those leading the initiatives and those who will be affected by its implementation. What is being asked of them and how are they responding? By monitoring how people are reacting to the process the leaders are able to learn a great deal about their congregation. These learnings, in turn, can help leaders determine whether modifications to the planning process are needed in response to the reactions. These learnings can also help the process leaders as they shape the final vision for future direction. Some factors leaders need to be mindful of here are:

- **The Leadership:** Does the team have the numbers, talent, time, energy, commitment and knowledge to do the job? Who needs to be added to the team? What training could help them in their task? A team that perceives its strength and ability has greater corporate efficacy and thus stronger motivation to serve. A strong team will also build the congregation's trust.
- **The Corporate Efficacy Beliefs of the Congregation:** It is not only about whether the people can be effective in making the proposed changes, they must also believe they can. If corporate efficacy beliefs are weak, the purpose of the planning process should probably be to name goals of only moderate

difficulty. A congregation that quickly achieves goals of moderate difficulty will strengthen their sense of corporate efficacy, and gain a greater confidence to stretch for something of greater difficulty. If weak corporate efficacy exists, then it may be prudent to consider this round of planning for the future to be a preliminary round that is building the launching pad for more to come.

- **Discrepancy:** the more congregants appreciate that there is a gap needing to be addressed between their current reality and the proposed goal, the higher the motivation.
- **Risk Acceptance:** Every congregation has its comfort zone when it comes to the risk of making changes. While you may have a good sense of what that is generally for your church, actual discussions about specific concrete changes can surface new concerns regarding risk.
- **Stakeholders:** The proposals may affect some people more than others. It is quite wise to work with these groups more conscientiously so they can help you make any possible modifications that can help them. A discipline of study called Organizational Justice has found that stakeholders are most willing to accept change if they perceive that they have been treated fairly, even if in the end they haven't gotten their way. Leaders should be open with the congregation that certain groups may be more affected than others, communicate that they are working with these groups and report on successes for moving the plans forward. Any efforts that are made to eliminate an "us vs. them" mentality and to promote the idea that "we are one body considering these directions together" will all pay off great benefits in the end. Include stakeholders in all planning.
- **Resistance and Conflict:** It is highly unlikely that your congregation will quickly and unanimously adopt new initiatives for the future, especially if some people perceive personal costs in doing so. Not all congregations, however, are able to discuss their differences of opinion in dispassionate ways. As well, not all congregations are able to discuss their differences in the open. The leadership needs to be aware of and responsive to resistance and conflict as best they can before proposals go to a final, formal vote. This will be explored further in chapter seven.

The state of the congregation in these four aspects of specific readiness all contribute to the **Degree of Intention to Act**. These strengthen motivation in the following ways:

- The Change Content highlights the motives for moving ahead on new initiatives,
- The Change Process can build the necessary trust in the leadership,
- The Change Context can be framed to move discussion towards decision,
- The People Engaging Change can be supported through the planning process, which builds confidence, efficacy and reduces anxiety.

If these four aspects of specific readiness are kept in mind throughout the planning process, the leadership will be continuing to build the launching pad for change and enhancing the motivational climate of the congregation. Adjusting the planning process in response to the emerging needs of people is an excellent way of not only improving the process on-the-fly but also for communicating to the congregation that “you are important in this” and potentially fostering the greater trust of the congregation in the leadership.

Assessing the Congregation’s Readiness for Change With Regards to Your Specific Plans

You are not done with building specific readiness when the vision, goals and plans have been determined and communicated through the Change Message. Being mindful of congregational motivation throughout the planning process is an invaluable help, but that may not assure you that your work has been effective in this regard. Leaders should take the pulse of the congregation before it is asked to give its final endorsement of the plans. Recent work in the motivation of entire organizations is highlighting the need to consider one’s organization as a group of individuals rather than seeing it as a homogenous entity. Consequently it can be helpful to survey your congregation to determine how effective you have been in your motivational efforts in the planning process and to determine the degree of intentionality to act. There are several benefits to conducting such a survey:

- The survey becomes another indication to the congregation that the leadership desires clear, open and responsive communications with everyone,
- It signals to the congregation the leadership’s desire for individual involvement, which strengthens trust in the leadership,
- It builds the congregation’s belief that they do have opportunities to participate in the planning process and that their needs and concerns are being heard,
- It can assess the congregation’s degree of intention to act, by determining what people believe about the change content, their sense of corporate efficacy and their readiness to proceed.
- It can discover areas of weakness in the planning process or concerns about the plan itself that can be addressed and strengthened before the congregation is asked to give final approval for the proposed initiatives.
- It can give the leadership confidence that the congregation is prepared to give its solid endorsement to the proposals.

Years ago a colleague of mine shared with me this simple bit of wisdom: “never ask the congregation to make a decision before it is ready to make it”. It is an encouragement for leaders to be absolutely sure they have done all they can to set the stage for the strongest affirmative response by the largest number of people possible for a proposed initiative. Even if the leadership thinks it has done all it can to make this happen, they really won’t know how effective they have been until they ask as many people as

possible. If that assessment is left until the final, formal moment of decision, and the affirmation is not as strong as needed, the leadership may have lost its one opportunity to get the go ahead.

The following survey is a generic assessment tool to gauge the congregation's specific readiness for change that you can use at this point before the final, formal decision is asked for. This survey is built on the work of Holt et. al. (2007) and the four aspects of specific readiness that we looked at above. The following table shows how each of the questions are classified and what they are measuring. Use this table as a guide in analyzing the survey results and as an index to the discussions found above. As you look at the results, ask the following questions of each issue in turn:

Is there sufficient positive agreement on this point to allow us to move forward?

If not, what might we have to do to build a more positive assessment on this issue?

When the response is not positive, view this reaction by the congregation as a need they have. As you respond to their need, you will improve the probability that the final formal decision will be very affirming of the proposed initiatives. At that moment, when the congregation sees its own strong intention to proceed in the public display of a congregational meeting, this too will add to the sense of efficacy and motivation to move.

Taking Our Pulse: What Do You Think About The Proposed Direction?

Thank you for the ways you have been involved so far in helping our church think about its future directions. We'd like to get your feedback once more through this survey. There are five possible responses to each of the items on the questionnaire. Circle the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

There are five possible responses:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I think we have to do this.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The plans seem sensible.	1	2	3	4	5
3. This direction aligns with my sense of how a church should live out its Christian faith.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Given our situation, this direction seems to be the best way forward.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I think we've got what it will take to do this.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The plan is clear and understandable.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The proposals seem to grow naturally out of the kind of church we already are.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel this direction is desirable.	1	2	3	4	5
9. We appear to have the people and ability to accomplish this.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am confident that the money we may need to accomplish this will be there.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am willing to give up some of our old ways if that is what it will take to do this.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Our congregational leaders appear to be behind this plan.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I know that any concerns I had regarding how this will affect me have been addressed.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I trust our leadership to help us make this happen.	1	2	3	4	5
15. What I have been told about this has been helpful and complete.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I feel I have been given sufficient opportunity to participate so far.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Our church leaders will provide us with every support as we make this happen.	1	2	3	4	5
18. My questions and concerns appear to have been heard and addressed.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Our church is generally open to new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The congregation is ready for a new challenge.	1	2	3	4	5
21. There are no "old scars" of issues from the past that will impede movement in this direction.	1	2	3	4	5

22. The way our church is organized will help make this happen.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I think this is the best time to move ahead on these proposals.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I know that who we are as a church will help make this happen.	1	2	3	4	5
25. People generally seem ready to go now.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Knowing the reasons for this plan helps me appreciate our need to change.	1	2	3	4	5
27. The people most affected by this new direction appear to have been approached and heard, and that their concerns have been responded to.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I feel that the gain is worth the risk.	1	2	3	4	5
29. The pace of change is realistic and acceptable.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Everyone in our church agrees with this new direction.	1	2	3	4	5
31. People are enthusiastic regarding these proposals.	1	2	3	4	5
32. It may not be easy to make this happen, but I know our church will be able to cope just fine.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I know that when we do this our church will be stronger and more confident.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you wish to let us know anything specific, please attach your comments to this survey form.

This survey is intended to be anonymous. However, if you wish to let us know who you are, please use this space.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

“Taking our Pulse”: Interpreting the Survey

The Change Content	Measures:
1. I think we have to do this.	Importance
2. The plans seem sensible.	Ability
3. This direction agrees with my sense of how a church should live out its Christian faith.	Beliefs
4. Given our situation, this direction seems to be the best way forward	Idea
5. I think we've got what it will take to do this.	Ability
6. The plan is clear and understandable.	Idea
7. The proposals seem to grow naturally out of the kind of church we already are.	Beliefs
8. I feel this direction is desirable.	Benefits
9. We appear to have the people and ability to accomplish this.	Ability: Resources
10. I am confident that the money we may need to accomplish this will be there.	Ability: Resources
11. I am willing to give up some of our old ways if that is what it will take to do this.	Cost
The Change Process	
12. Our congregational leaders appear to be behind this plan.	Leader Support
13. I know that any concerns I had regarding how this will affect me have been addressed.	Stakeholders
14. I trust our leadership to help us make this happen.	Leader Trust
15. What I have been told about this has been helpful and complete.	Communications
16. I feel I have been given sufficient opportunity to participate so far.	Participation
17. Our church leaders will provide us with every support as we make this happen.	Leader Trust
18. My questions and concerns appear to have been heard and addressed.	Communications
The Change Context	
19. Our church is generally open to new ideas.	Congregational Culture
20. The congregation is ready for a new challenge.	General Readiness
21. There are no “old scars” of issues from the past that will impede movement in this direction.	History
22. The way our church is organized will help make this happen.	Governance
23. I think this is the best time to move ahead on these proposals.	Timing
24. I know that who we are as a church will help make this happen.	Congregational Culture
The People Engaging Change	
25. People generally seem ready to go now.	Is there Resistance?
26. Knowing the reasons for this plan helps me appreciate our need to change.	Discrepancy
27. The people most affected by this new direction appear to have been approached and heard, and that their concerns have been responded to.	Stakeholders
28. I feel that the gain is worth the risk.	Risk Acceptance
29. The pace of change is realistic and acceptable.	Rate of Change
30. Everyone in our church agrees with this new direction.	Is there Conflict?
31. People are enthusiastic regarding these proposals.	Confidence level
32. It may not be easy to make this happen, but I know our church will be able to cope just fine.	Corporate Efficacy & Stress
33. I know that when we do this our church will be stronger and more confident.	Corporate Efficacy

Jesus knew about readiness for change. Pentecost showed us that the Holy Spirit has great changing power, but the Church was not created through Pentecost alone. The apostles were disciples of Jesus for three years and over that time Jesus built their readiness for change. As they traveled together they heard the *content* of His message over and over again until they knew Jesus' teachings almost as well as their Master did. The nature of the Kingdom of God would have inspired them, *motivating* them to desire it fully. Watching the *process* of miracle after miracle, hearing Him communicate "with power" day after day, inviting all to come to Him as little children would... all these things would have built their *trust* in their leader to be the one to bring that Kingdom to fullness. The *context* of Jesus' ministry – the Old Testament prophecies, the reviled Roman rule, the reactions of the crowds, the obvious need of people clamoring for what Jesus offered – would have *confirmed their decisions* that this way was the right way. He sent them out in pairs to do the work of evangelism as a foretaste of their future ministry. They returned excited, saying "Lord, in Your name even the demons submit to us!" (Luke 10:17-20). The experience gave them a greater sense of *self-efficacy*. So too would Jesus' words at the Last Supper when He told them, "I no longer call you servants, but I now call you friends" (John 15:15). The dangers of the final days in Jerusalem before the crucifixion made plain the dangers that could befall them in the time to follow. But day after day Jesus carried them, through their questions and concerns, supporting them until they could profess "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29). He *knew their needs and responded to them*. Yet even with the immense evidence of the resurrection, they still gathered uncertainly on the day of Pentecost. With all this it still took the touch of the Holy Spirit to embolden and empower their ministry to fulfill the great goal given them by their Master: "Go therefore and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

As leaders we can only do so much, and it is never enough. It is unlikely for everyone in a church to be fully ready for change when it comes. The disciples weren't as they huddled behind closed doors on Pentecost. Thank God for the Holy Spirit. Congregational change is like spiritual conversion, and leaders and disciples can only do so much by human effort alone. As leaders of change, we are wise to recall Paul's words about changing human hearts: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). This is our prayer.

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