

Prochaska's Transtheoretical Model¹

(Submitted by Dr. Peter Coutts, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Calgary, AB)

According to this model, people move through five stages of change:

Pre-contemplation: A church is unaware of its situation so no problems are perceived. Congregations in this stage see no need to change and for that reason will probably exhibit either apathy or resistance to any call for change. Leaders in this stage must educate their congregation regarding their goal drift and their growing irrelevance. This is done by presenting disconfirmations of the congregation's belief that everything is fine. As well, leaders can help the congregation understand the probable costs of inertia. This helps congregants appreciate that something needs to be "contemplated."

Contemplation: A portion of the congregation becomes aware of issues that need to be addressed. In the Contemplation stage, a search for more information and clarity is undertaken. This is a learning phase where leaders help people look below the surface of their situation. While Pre-contemplation is mostly about "what" is happening, the Contemplation stage is more about helping people appreciate "why" it is happening. The process for learning may not be very active or focused, but there is a willingness to explore the congregation's situation more deeply. As a result, some may come to view the situation as serious, grow anxious about it, and want to act with urgency. This can create confusion and even anger among others who are still in the Pre-contemplation stage. For those ready to act, leaders may need to counsel them to be patient and solicit their help in the education of those still in Pre-contemplation.

Preparation: A decision for future action is made but a real commitment to act is not quite there yet. In this stage, it is common for congregants to take up the traditional fixes with greater effort, believing that the situation has resulted from not working hard enough at their tried-and-true solutions. It is often only after they have found them to be no longer effective that a congregation can feel compelled (or resigned) to assume new approaches. People in this phase can also fall into paralysis, believing that they are acting when, in fact, they are not. Because of these things, the Preparation stage is still a learning phase requiring great patience on the part of the leadership. It can be like the exodus Israelites in the wilderness, wanting to go back to slavery in Egypt rather than progressing towards all the benefits of Canaan. Progressing forward frequently is only possible once it has been proven that going back is no longer an option.

¹ James Prochaska is the Director of the Cancer Prevention Research Center and Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Rhode Island. The American Psychology Society named him one of the top five most cited authors in psychology. The Transtheoretical Model was developed in the medical field from a comparative analysis of 18 major psychotherapy and behavioural change models. In recent years, it has found growing use in many disciplines outside of medicine, including organizational behaviour. For its use in organizational change, see Prochaska, J.M., Prochaska, J.O., and Levesque, D.A. 2001. A Transtheoretical Approach to Changing Organizations. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 247-261.

Action: This is the phase when new behaviours are tried. It is at this stage that congregations will substantially agree to adopt a new change process for themselves: evolutionary, goal-oriented, or dialectic change. These newly adopted processes typically bring new ideas and enthusiasm leading to changed ways. But these new ways may not hold at first. People can find themselves reverting back to past behaviors. Indeed, the Transtheoretical Model insists that reversion can happen through several cycles of attempted change. This is highly frustrating and demoralizing for leaders who often assume upon the first or second reversion that the change process has failed. However, these relapses to the old ways are also learning experiences for the congregation from which vital clues for improving implementation can be drawn.

Maintenance: A new practice has been effectively adopted. In the Maintenance stage, the new practice needs to be entrenched in the congregation's behaviour. In this phase, a new change process must also be maintained or else the congregation will revert to the life cycle change and in time find themselves back in their original situation.

This will have a ring of truth for many congregational leaders who have found their congregation unresponsive to proactive change efforts. The Transtheoretical Model for change is a helpful leadership strategy for encouraging a congregation to leave the life cycle change. Once sufficient congregants have moved along into the Preparation and Action stages, leaders can then shift the congregation to adopt evolutionary, goal-oriented, or dialectic change processes as their new, default process.