

## Strengths and weaknesses of mobilising whole denominations through organisational change processes

### Strengths of organisational change processes

1. Change processes should create an organisation that is committed to, and structured around, the outworking of its mission. This makes **it more focused and effective in bringing about real change**.
2. Such processes can be particularly appropriate for a church denomination since the **structures are already present to enable the renewed vision** and training to cascade easily downwards to local churches. Once the change process is complete, the impact at grassroots level can be felt after a relatively short time.
3. Although expensive, **change processes are cost-effective**, since they address issues at the core of the organisation and ensures that all staff members are working towards the same goal. Once issues at the core have been tackled, the positive impact of a change process can trickle down to the grassroots.

### Weaknesses of organisational change processes

Organisational change processes are vulnerable to failure:

1. **Processes can take years rather than months to complete**. During this time, commitment to the process of the organisation, the leadership and the staff members can fluctuate. Key staff could leave the organisation and the external environment may change. The process can be frustrating for those involved because it is only at the end of the process that there are tangible results.
2. **Processes are reliant on staff members** having time to participate. It can be difficult for senior staff in particular to give the process their full attention or make it their top priority.
3. **Processes rely on the presence of skilled staff members** who can develop, implement and manage the change plan. Often an organisational change process is needed because there is a lack of skilled staff to begin with.
4. **Processes may challenge power relationships** and can therefore easily lose the support of senior staff members.
5. All staff within the organisation need to be committed to the process. If owned only by a small team within the organisation, **the process can lack effectiveness and impact**. It is not enough for the leadership to simply invest resources and personnel in the process. They need to be personally involved.
6. **Processes model top-down change**. While this is a strength of such processes because it makes them effective and efficient, this can also be seen as a weakness because such an approach does not model good development practice. In a denomination there is a danger that the denomination sets the agenda and the local churches follow. It is important that the local church owns the work and takes the lead.
7. In the case of a denominational change process, there is a **danger that the impact stops at the local church**. The hope is that once the church is changed, the community will benefit. However, local churches often look inwards rather than outwards. The link between the church and the community should be investigated and addressed as part of the change process.
8. Since organisational change processes involve training staff with the intention that they then pass the training on, **the quality of the training could deteriorate** by the time it reaches local church members, who may be receiving training second- or third-hand.

Source: *ROOTS 11: Partnering with the local church*, Tearfund 2007, pages 49-50

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