

# 3 TYPES OF CHANGE...AND HOW THEY IMPACT PLANNING AND BUY-IN

by [Stephen Blandino](#) | [Church](#), [Leadership](#), [Organizations](#)

Leading change in any organization can be complicated and cumbersome. The fact is, two of the most important factors in any change is *planning* and *buy-in*. Simply put, you need time to plan a successful change, and you need buy-in from key stakeholders to ensure it gets off the ground.

Without a good plan, and without adequate buy-in, you'll be dead in the water.

The smaller the change, the less time you need for planning and buy-in. In fact, some changes are so small that people will hardly blink twice when the changes are made. You don't need anyone's input or permission, and therefore the time it takes to plan it and the buy-in it requires to execute it is hardly even an issue.

Big changes, on the other hand, are different. The bigger the change, the more time you'll spend crafting a thorough plan of execution. You'll also spend more time generating buy-in from the people you need to help turn the change into reality.

I like to compare this change process to different types of transportation. Every form of transportation is designed to get you from point A to point B. Point A is your current reality. Point B is your ultimate destination. The question is, what form of transportation is best to get you to your final destination. In the context of churches and organizations, the answer depends on the size of the change.

## 1. SMALL CHANGES ARE LIKE HELICOPTERS

A couple of years ago me, my wife Karen, and some members of my family, took a helicopter ride in Alaska. Our destination was a massive, beautiful glacier. It was an amazing, awe-inspiring experience. We lifted off quickly, flew for about ten minutes, and then landed on a flat space on the glacier. After hiking around for about an hour, we loaded the helicopter and made a safe return trip.

Helicopters are unique. It didn't take us a long time to load them, and when it was time to depart, we lifted off fairly quickly. That's the nature of small changes. There's not much preparation, and the change is airborne almost immediately.

“Helicopter changes” in any organization usually require little (if any) planning, and they don’t require much (if any) discussion. In fact, some helicopter changes are so minor that the leader can make them without any fear of fallout. It might be a minor modification to the layout of a report, a change that impacts only the leader, or a change in the location or time of a meeting.

## **2. MEDIUM CHANGES ARE LIKE AIRPLANES**

Airplanes require runways. Small planes need shorter runways while big planes require longer runways. For example, a Cessna 172 Skyhawk needs 995 feet to become airborne. This is a small plane with very limited seating capacity. But when you board a Boeing 777-300, you need 8,858 feet of runway to get airborne.

Change in organizations is similar. Medium size changes need longer runways to get airborne. Unlike “helicopter changes” that can lift off immediately, “airplane changes” need a longer runway to give you adequate time for planning and for creating buy-in.

Airplane changes might include things like staffing decisions, changes in programs or strategies, or reallocating financial resources toward more strategic initiatives. You need time to prepare and enough runway to generate buy-in so the change can actually take flight.

## **3. LARGE CHANGES ARE LIKE CRUISE SHIPS**

A few years ago, we took a cruise to the Caribbean with a couple of friends, and a couple of years ago my family did a cruise to Alaska. On both cruises, there was a long preparation period before we ever departed. It took hours to load everyone onto the boat, train them in safety measures, and eventually pull away from the dock. It was a slow but very necessary process.

The same is true on the open sea. Cruise ships don’t turn quickly like small boats. If they need to go a new direction, it takes time to turn such a large vessel. A similar principle applies when making big changes in organizations.

“Cruise ship changes” are major changes that have long-lasting impact on the organization. These changes might include things like a massive new vision initiative, the launch of a new store or campus, or a major change in strategic direction. These kinds of changes don’t happen quickly. Like

a cruise ship, they require lots of preparation and planning as they get everyone on board and properly trained. Like a large cruise ship, it takes time to turn an organization and head a completely new direction. But this extended period of planning, and the time it takes to create broad buy-in, are essential to success.

It's important to understand what category each change you make fits in, and to treat them accordingly. For example, if you treat *airplane* or *cruise ship* changes like a *helicopter change*, you'll likely generate massive opposition, waste precious resources, disrupt morale, and encounter an unsuccessful or extremely difficult change. On the other hand, if you treat *helicopter changes* like an *airplane* or *cruise ship* change, you'll only slow your organization down with unnecessary meetings and increasing levels of bureaucracy.

Planning and buy-in are essential to any organizational change. But the first step is knowing what type of change you are embarking on. By determining if it's a *helicopter*, *airplane*, or *cruise ship change*, you'll be prepared to look at planning and buy-in efforts through the proper lens.