

Corporate Power Responsibility in Faith-Based Organizations: Transitioning Mill City Church to Shared Leadership - A Change Initiative Plan

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Executive Summary

The responsible use of power is a critical issue in today's leadership landscape (Singh, 2019). The American Evangelical Church is not exempt from this issue. The core drive of this change initiative plan is an example of a bold transition from centralized power structures in the church centered around the "*lead pastor*" to a shared, decentralized leadership structure. Through the empowerment of teams, individuals, and stakeholders, a more responsible use of power will be promoted.

This initiative prioritizes key transformational areas as it moves towards polycentric leadership structures to promote multiple centers of power (Yeh, 2016). Leadership roles will be redefined to emphasize team collaboration over hierarchy (Kocolowski, 2010), fostering dynamic collaboration and network thinking (Staples UK, 2017).

Transparent communication will be ingrained, empowering individuals and facilitating the application of "*complexity leadership*" theory (Towler, 2020), while allowing teams

autonomy in decision-making (Anon, 2023), thus nurturing trust and fostering accountability. Lastly, strategies will be implemented to recruit, retain and train a skilled and diverse workforce, ensuring the initiative's success (Raithel, Knippenberg, and Stam, 2021).

This transformational approach will enable Mill City Church to create an environment that is more influential, inclusive, and sustainable, enhancing its impact both within and outside its immediate sphere of influence. Additionally, by demonstrating this novel form of leadership, the church hopes to set an example for other religious organizations that are concerned about power abuse.

The Need for Change

Over the past 25 years, 40 million Americans have left the church, with numbers steadily rising (www.wbur.org, 2022). Trust in church institutions is declining due to frequent reports of power abuse by church leaders, exposing the flaws of centralized power structures (Inc, 2024). Furthermore, it is argued that traditional hierarchical models, where a single pastor holds most decision-making power, are increasingly ineffective in today's VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world (Bennis and Nanus, 2007).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted these shortcomings, leading to drops in attendance, polarization within congregations, and reduced community engagement as church leadership struggled to adapt (pages.churchsalary.com, n.d.). Barna's research further indicates a precarious future for the church, marked by a significant decline in Gen Z participation, primarily stemming from their rejection of patriarchal

leadership systems and their insistence on inclusivity, specifically for the LGBTQIA community (Barna Group, n.d.).

Change Impact Assessment

Analysis of Organization

Situated in Fort Collins, Colorado, Mill City Church, a 501c3 faith-based non-profit (Kagan, 2022), stands as a dynamic and compassionate community dedicated to serving its city (Mill City Church, n.d.). Through service and outreach efforts, the church fosters a culture of authentic fellowship, meaningful worship, and practical faith.

Strengths of the Organization

The congregation of Mill City Church comprises several hundred members, with a strong volunteer network supporting its diverse ministries and initiatives. Mill City Church's dedicated volunteers play a crucial role in children's programs, hospitality, worship teams, and service projects. Guiding the church's efforts is a team of 10-15 staff members, encompassing pastoral, administrative, worship leadership, and ministry coordination roles.

Trustees and overseers from other churches provide oversight and accountability regarding financial matters. Mill City Church's key strength lies in its outreach efforts beyond its premises. Through collaborations with local organizations, it addresses

pressing social issues like homelessness, food insecurity, and education, showcasing its commitment to serving Fort Collins (Mill City Church, n.d.).

Weaknesses of the Organization

Despite its successes, Mill City Church needs to address key areas to enhance effectiveness, reduce risks, and ensure sustainability. The hierarchical leadership model, centered on a single lead pastor, faces limitations in today's VUCA world (Bennis and Nanus, 2007). While clear authority lines can be beneficial (TUW author, 2019) especially in larger churches, critics argue that this model can lead to decision-making bottlenecks, slow responses to challenges, and power abuse (Allen, 2023). It also stifles innovation by limiting diverse perspectives (Yeh, 2016).

Furthermore, Mill City Church faces challenges with its staffing, potentially jeopardizing its operations and longevity. Managing a sizable congregation with a small staff of 10-15 individuals can result in burnout and decreased efficiency (Hill, n.d.). Moreover, the church experiences communication gaps and under utilizes stakeholder input, hampering effective engagement with congregants, volunteers, and community partners. This disconnect impacts the overall effectiveness of the church's endeavors (Angela, 2024).

Stakeholder Analysis

Recognizing the breadth of stakeholders, their interests, influence, and significance is crucial for effectively executing this change initiative plan at Mill City Church (Martins, 2023). Engaging with stakeholders including congregation members,

volunteers, staff, trustees, community organizations, and critics of the hierarchical church model is essential. Listening to their perspectives, partnering with them, and addressing their concerns will be pivotal as the church navigates this change initiative.

Scope of Change

To adequately prepare for the forthcoming change initiative at Mill City Church, it's essential to grasp its scope. Transitioning from a hierarchical to a shared leadership model necessitates a second-order transformation encompassing the organization's structure, culture, and operational principles (Smith, 2018). This transformative shift entails a fundamental overhaul of the church's core values, structures, and processes, differing from first-order changes that focus on incremental adjustments within existing frameworks.

As Peter Senge, a systems scientist and senior lecturer at MIT, highlights, *"true systemic (second-order) change involves adopting new ways of thinking, establishing new formal structures, and ultimately, transforming relationships"* (Senge et al., 2007). Mill City Church must embark on this profound level of change as it embraces Corporate Power Responsibility (CPR) and integrates shared leadership practices throughout the organization.

Benefits of Change

Mill City Church's transition to shared leadership offers significant benefits. Firstly, it mitigates risks associated with future church operations, particularly addressing the

growing intolerance for power abuse among younger generations (Barna Group, n.d.). In the absence of this change, the church's future is at risk. Secondly, transitioning to shared leadership can lead to more effective operations, a clearer vision, and greater impact.

Research shows that organizations with shared leadership structures experience a 34% increase in effectiveness compared to traditional leadership models (Wang, Waldman, and Zhang, 2014). Finally, Mill City Church sets a powerful example by pioneering this shift in church governance, establishing itself as a leader in healthy and sustainable church governance.

Risks of Change

“Embracing change means embracing risk” (Shore, 2016).

Every change initiative comes with inherent risks. Identifying these potential risks from the outset allows for effective monitoring and mitigation. The identified risks as Mill City Church transitions to shared leadership are as follows:

1. Resistance to change from members, volunteers, and staff.
2. Leadership challenges in redefining roles and fostering collaboration.
3. Communication breakdowns leading to misunderstandings.
4. Increased workload and stress potentially causing staff burnout.
5. Potential loss of focus on the church's mission and values.

6. Cultural and theological resistance to moving away from traditional hierarchical leadership structures.
7. Financial risks due to resource investment of time and money without guaranteed outcomes.

Tracking these risks through a comprehensive risk log, documenting all identified risks, their contributing factors, and their current status will be essential (Shore, 2016).

Addressing and Mitigating Resistance

“Innovation is often less about generating brand-new ideas and more about overcoming barriers to implementing those ideas” (Kotter, 2014).

Change inherently encounters resistance, as it can be perceived as a threat to well-being. This is especially true for transitions to shared leadership, which can challenge deeply ingrained cultural conditioning and long-standing myths that view leadership as singular (O'Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler, 2002). Common reasons for resistance include the rapid pace of change, feelings of being overlooked in the process, or outright disagreement with the proposed changes (Leading sustainable change Wisdom from textbooks and trenches in post-quake Canterbury, n.d.).

For Mill City Church, resistance may also stem from theological interpretations regarding women's leadership and entrenched traditional patriarchal leadership models (Pagan, 2019). Addressing these concerns transparently and inclusively is crucial for mitigating resistance and fostering a supportive environment for change.

Proposed Change Goals

For this initiative, Mill City Church has outlined six change goals to guide their transition to shared leadership. These goals include: implementing polycentric leadership with multiple centers of power, redesigning church leaders' roles to function as team facilitators, fostering network thinking across diverse stakeholder teams, promoting open and transparent communication, encouraging empowered autonomy, and establishing a skilled and diverse team.

Polycentric Leadership

The first change goal for Mill City Church involves moving its organizational structure to one that fosters polycentric leadership. Leadership models in American churches are firmly rooted in biblical teaching, historical precedent, and cultural norms emphasizing individual charismatic authority (Gautsch and Setley, 2016).

While it can be argued that this hierarchical model is effective in streamlining operations and ensuring some measure of accountability, it faces mounting challenges amidst a shifting landscape characterized by declining trust and an imperative for adaptability. A shift towards decentralized, polycentric leadership structures is gaining traction, promoting inclusivity, innovation, and collaborative decision-making (Yeh, 2016).

Influenced by organizational theory and political science, polycentric leadership disperses decision-making among multiple centers, fostering dynamic and adaptive organizations. Shared and distributed leadership theories further support this

transition, advocating for a spread of leadership responsibilities to navigate complex environments responsibly (Kocolowski, 2010).

Team Facilitators

In changing towards shared leadership, Mill City Church will overhaul its criteria for recruiting and training leaders and managers. Rather than seeking directors who rely on "*command and control*" approaches to oversee departments, it will seek out individuals who thrive as intuitive team facilitators.

These leaders typically excel at cultivating collaboration, nurturing emotional well-being, and empowering team members to make valuable contributions, recognizing the significance of each employee in driving organizational success (Vickberg, 2010). They serve as enablers, embodying a calm presence that inspires innovation, networking, and effective decision-making within their teams.

Network Thinking

This change initiative also aims to foster collaboration within the organization by embracing network thinking over traditional linear leadership models (Staples UK, 2017). Unlike traditional approaches that develop strategies independently, network thinking perceives systems as interconnected networks, prioritizing relationships over individual components.

By promoting collaboration and innovation, this approach harnesses community insights (Senge et al., 2007), involves multidisciplinary teams, diverse stakeholders, and iterative processes (Staples UK, 2017). Implementing network thinking across

church activities, including teaching, staff development, community organization, and service outreach, will unlock creativity, address real needs, and cultivate a unified organizational vision.

Open and Interactive Communication

Mill City Church's change initiative will focus on creating open and interactive communication. Traditional hierarchical systems breed top-down decision-making, closed-door conversations, and transparency gaps leading to diminished engagement among key stakeholders.

Embracing transformational (Lai et al., 2020) and servant leadership principles (Saleem et al., 2020), the initiative focuses on integrating inclusive and collaborative communication to motivate stakeholders and harness complexity leadership benefits (Hall, 2023), where any participant can influence dynamics, and promote synergistic innovation through real-time interaction (Towler, 2020).

A notable example of successful open and interactive communication is BT, the UK telecommunications company, which implemented an internal wiki, blogging initiative, and social network. These measures significantly empowered its workforce, leading to increased ownership and responsibility among employees (Vickberg, 2010).

Empowered Autonomy

As part of this change initiative, Mill City Church can benefit greatly from team autonomy. Team autonomy enhances operational efficiency and allows rapid

adaptation to changing circumstances (Anon, 2023). As a result, team members are more accountable and own the outcomes they directly influence. Also, autonomy allows teams to experiment with creative ideas without restriction by hierarchies, which encourages diverse perspectives and innovative solutions.

However, successful team autonomy requires careful planning, support, and tools to ensure alignment with the church's broader mission and values. Regular communication and feedback mechanisms are essential to maintaining this alignment.

Skilled and Diverse Workforce

As Mill City Church transitions to shared leadership, building a skilled and diverse team is essential. Unlike traditional hierarchical structures that can depend on familiar hiring practices, inherited roles, and insider promotions, shared leadership thrives on merit and varied perspectives. Prioritizing the recruitment of highly skilled individuals for each role, irrespective of their background, creates a dynamic team with a wide array of experiences, talents, and insights (Raithel, Knippenberg, and Stam, 2021).

Embracing diversity in age, gender, race, and other demographics fosters an inclusive and equitable environment where every team member's voice is valued and respected. This diversity enriches decision-making processes and encourages creativity, innovation, and adaptability, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and benefits of the shared power dynamic within the organization.

As E. Hoch notes, *"shared leadership was more strongly associated with team performance in more diverse teams and less in less diverse teams,"* (E. Hoch, 2014) highlighting the critical importance of diversity in maximizing the advantages of shared leadership.

Change Strategy: Model and Theories

Our approach to managing this second-order change initiative will integrate Lewin's Change Management Model (Burnes, 2020) with Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (Graves et al., 2023). As part of strategy, many methodologies, frameworks, and best practices will be integrated, such as stakeholder engagement, transparent communication, comprehensive training, and continuous improvement.

By using Lewin's three-stage model of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, we can clearly understand what is required of the organization (Burnes, 2020). This is complemented by Kotter's step-by-step approach, which among other things emphasizes creating a sense of urgency, forming a guiding coalition, and embedding new practices into organizational culture (ResearchGate, n.d.).

I believe that combining these theories enables us to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses initial disruption and transition phases while integrating new behaviors. Merging Lewin's simplicity with Kotter's detailed action plan ensures successful second-order change.

Change Initiative Plan

(Figure 1)

This change initiative plan follows three phases based on Lewin's change model (Burnes, 2020), incorporates eight workflows using Kotter's 8-Step model (Graves et al., 2023), and sets milestones for each workflow to measure progress (Harrington, Voehl and Voehl, 2019).

Phases: Unfreeze, Change and Refreeze

The phases span fourteen months of change: a four-month preparatory unfreezing phase, followed by a six-month implementation of change, and concluding with a four-month embedding or refreezing phase (Ignite Consulting, 2023).

Unfreeze

"Shared leadership requires extensive preparatory work to overcome traditional professional demarcations." (Steinert, Goebel and Rieger, 2006)

Lewin's *"unfreeze"* phase is the first part of change for the organization. It involves preparing Mill City Church for change by disrupting its current *"quasi-stationary"* equilibrium (Burnes, 2020). Unfreezing the existing state can create a receptive environment for the upcoming transition and ensure a smoother implementation of new processes and behaviors hoped for. Instead of carrying on business as usual, the unfreezing stage creates a compelling case for change.

The length of Lewin's unfreezing stage depends on the complexity of the change. Typically it takes several months for an organization the size of Mill City Church to effectively generate dissatisfaction with the status quo, establish a new direction, build a coalition, and create a compelling vision (Ignite Consulting, 2023).

Change

Lewin's second stage of change, the "*change*" or "*transition*" phase, involves moving from the current state to the desired state by implementing the changes identified during the unfreezing stage. This phase for Mill City Church will include developing new behaviors, processes, and ways of thinking.

Change agents will need to enlist a volunteer army, remove barriers to enable action, and generate a series of short-term wins (Graves et al., 2023), thereby advancing stakeholders along the commitment curve towards successful change (Harrington, Voehl and Voehl, 2019).

Refreeze

Mill City Church will focus on solidifying the changes made during the transition to shared leadership, ensuring they become ingrained within the church's culture and operations during Lewin's "Refreeze" phase (Burnes, 2020). Reinforcing the new leadership structure, processes, and behaviors is part of this phase.

By embedding shared leadership into the fabric of the church, Mill City Church can maintain the momentum generated during the change process and prevent regression to old behaviors. As part of this phase, individuals are recognized for their contributions and shared leadership's vision and values are continuously reinforced.

This deliberate effort to refreeze the changes will ensure the long-term success and effectiveness of Mill City Church's shared leadership model.

Workflows and Milestones

The phases incorporate workflows based on Kotter's 8-Step model (kotter2022, n.d.) and include milestones to monitor progress (Harrington, Voehl and Voehl, 2019).

1. Creating a Sense of Urgency

Kotter's first step, "*Creating a Sense of Urgency*," will guide Mill City Church in embracing its first workflow, acknowledging the urgent need for shared leadership by taking a deep look at current issues and emphasizing its significant opportunities in pioneering change (kotter2022, n.d.). This will lay the foundation by structuring key messages and communication channels to convey urgency and opportunity to stakeholders.

Milestones for this workflow encompass identifying and articulating the reasons for change, effectively communicating the urgency to stakeholders through multiple channels, and gathering feedback to address concerns and reinforce the sense of urgency.

2. Building a Guiding Coalition

As part of Kotter's second step, "*building a guiding coalition*" (kotter2022, n.d.), Mill City Church will seek to create a committed team of diverse stakeholders dedicated to guiding the transition to shared leadership (Rajan and Ganesan, 2017). Tapping into the "*collective intelligence*" of the community this team will

provide “*deep under- standing*”, influence and commitment towards driving change (Senge et al., 2007).

The key milestones in this process involve identifying and recruiting influential individuals, assembling a diverse team representing various roles in the church, and holding initial coalition meetings (kotter2022, n.d.).

3. Forming a Strategic Vision

In the third stage of Kotter's model, “*forming a strategic vision*” (kotter2022, n.d.), change agents will craft a clear and compelling vision for its future. This involves developing strategic goals aligned with shared leadership change goals and effectively communicating this vision to all church members and stakeholders (Leader, 2023).

By inspiring enthusiasm and commitment to the vision within its community, the church sets the stage for successfully implementing the shared leadership model in the next phase of change.

4. Enlisting a Volunteer Army

One of the strengths of Mill City Church is its dedicated volunteers. By connecting with this already committed group and “*enlisting a volunteer army,*” (kotter2022, n.d.), the church can effectively drive large-scale change. Providing church members with a “*compelling reason to join the change movement, along with genuine permission to step up and act,*” will yield the most effective results (kotter2022, n.d.).

This approach leverages volunteers' enthusiasm and dedication to support and sustain the transformation process. The milestones for this workflow include motivating members, mobilizing volunteers and equipping them with training and resources to take ownership of the process of change.

5. Enabling Action by Removing Barriers

"Enabling action by removing barriers" (kotter2022, n.d.), is an imperative workflow Mill City Church must navigate in the implementation phase. This workflow involves identifying and overcoming resistance so that organization members can act effectively. Common barriers include *"silos"*, *"narrow thinking"*, pressures from day-to-day operations, *"complacency, and limited access to key leaders"* (Kotter, 2014).

Key strategies include training and fostering open dialogue to address concerns. Milestones for this workflow are identifying obstacles to change, developing and implementing strategies to overcome them, and empowering individuals to make decisions and take action.

6. Generate Short Term Wins

The final workflow for the change implantation phase is for Mill City Church change agents to *"generate short term wins"* (kotter2022, n.d.). *This workflow* emphasizes recognizing and acknowledging progress by telling positive stories, celebrating achievements, and reinforcing the commitment to change.

By showcasing successful examples of *"network thinking"*, team-driven innovation, and the impact of *"complexity leadership"* through open

communication, the church will build momentum, inspire confidence, and sustain enthusiasm for the ongoing transformation process.

Milestones for this phase include identifying, achieving, and communicating quick, impactful victories to maintain momentum and demonstrate the benefits of the shared leadership model.

7. Sustain Acceleration

Kotter's seventh step, *"sustain acceleration"* (kotter2022, n.d.), moves Mill City Church into the refreezing phase of the change initiative plan which emphasizes the importance of maintaining the initiatives' momentum by intensifying efforts to drive the transformation forward.

In this workflow, change agents are encouraged to maintain momentum after achieving a series of wins. Instead of slowing down, the team should intensify efforts by revisiting the sense of urgency, involving more people, and removing additional barriers (Kotter, 2014). The milestones involve building on initial successes, maintaining focus on the vision, reinforcing change benefits through ongoing communication and support, and identifying empowering initiatives to sustain momentum.

8. Institutionalize Change

Kotter's eighth step, *"institutionalize change"* (kotter2022, n.d.), focuses on ensuring the long-term sustainability of changes at Mill City Church by embedding them into the organization's culture and practices. This involves

reinforcing new behaviors, values, and practices to become integral to the organizational DNA.

Key activities include establishing feedback mechanisms and performance metrics to monitor the effectiveness of shared leadership practices and making necessary adjustments (Hristov and Chirico, 2019). Embedding shared leadership into team culture through shared language, celebrations, and incentives is also crucial (Bertels, Papania and Papania, 2010). Ultimately, institutionalizing shared leadership integrates it into the organization's culture and norms, ensuring its longevity beyond individual leaders or specific initiatives.

Milestones for this stage include integrating new practices and behaviors into the church's culture, establishing new leadership structures and processes, and monitoring the long-term impact of changes to make necessary adjustments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mill City Church's transition to shared leadership represents a pivotal shift towards responsible power dynamics in faith-based organizations. By embracing polycentric leadership, redefining leadership roles, fostering network thinking, promoting open communication, encouraging empowered autonomy, and building a skilled and diverse workforce, the church aims to enhance its effectiveness and sustainability.

Leveraging Lewin's Change Management Model and Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, this comprehensive change management plan navigates through unfreezing,

changing, and refreezing phases, addressing key workflows and milestones to ensure successful implementation.

Through these strategic efforts, Mill City Church seeks to pioneer a new standard of leadership in church governance, setting an example for others and ultimately fostering a more inclusive, impactful, and sustainable community.

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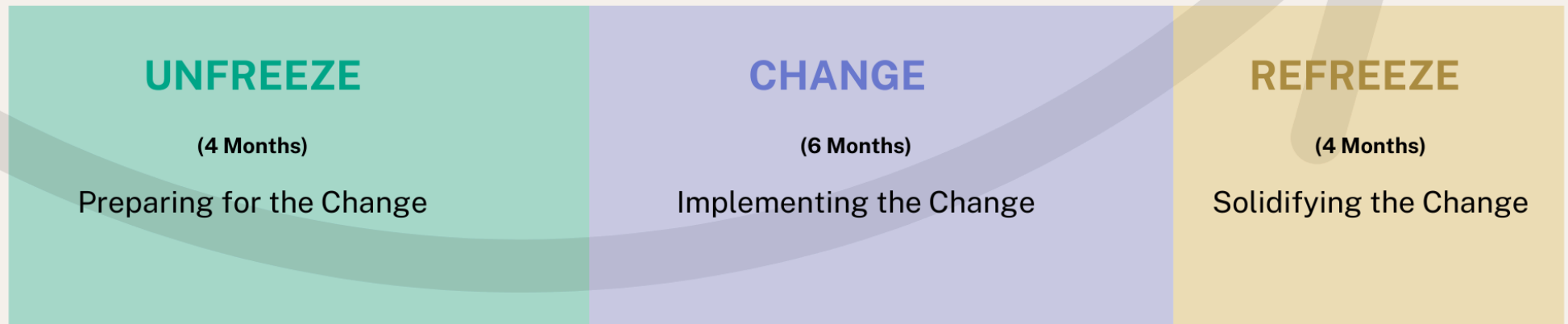
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Appendix

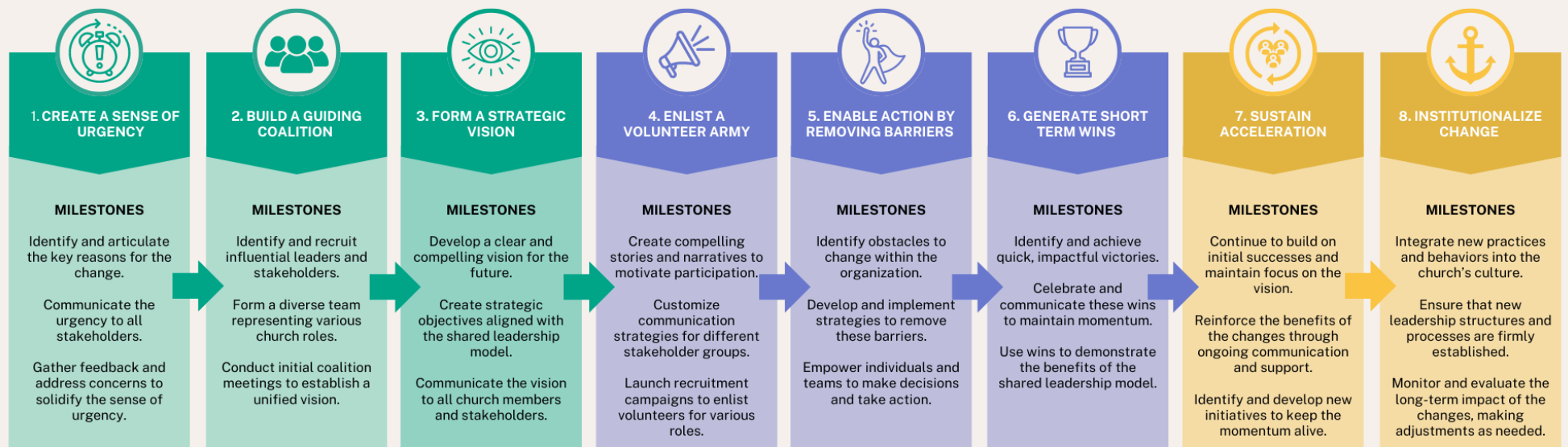
Figure 1

CHANGE INITIATIVE PLAN

LEWIN'S CHANGE MODE- THREE PHASES (BURNES, 2020)



KOTTER'S 8-STEP (WORKFLOWS)(KOTTER2022, N.D.)



MILESTONES TO MONITOR PROGRESS(HARRINGTON, VOEHL AND VOEHL, 2019)

FIGURE 1