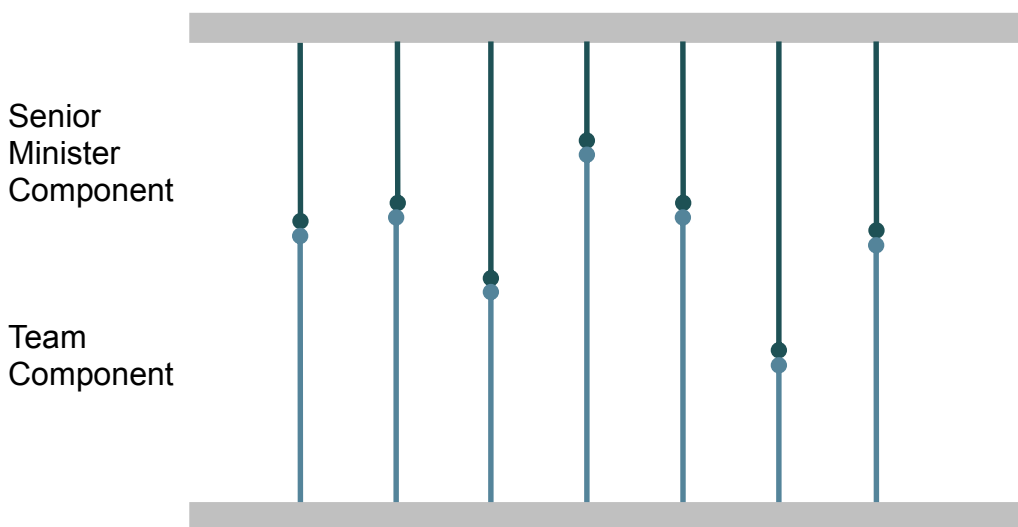


The Gaps and Overlaps Analysis

A helpful way to reflect on one of the change based causes of conflict and stress in churches is to think through a simple process we call a 'gaps and overlaps' analysis.

A gaps and overlaps scenario can unfold in several ways; a new senior minister replacing a long term minister, significant church growth, new staff members arriving, a restructure of ministries. Perhaps the most obvious example with which to begin is the first above.

Every senior minister and his/her group of staff, ministry leaders and volunteers form a largely unwritten understanding of how a wide range of church ministry tasks will be divided up. The part the senior minister plays will depend not only on his or her position description but also on elements of personal style, capacity, giftedness and the minister's own philosophy of ministry. The component made up by the team members is worked out as a combination of the ways things have always been done, and a degree of responsiveness to the situation created by the minister's take up or handing over of tasks. This can be diagrammed as below:



These tasks may include things like preaching, pastoral visitation, administration, managing other volunteers, attending various church and community group meetings, being chaplain to local community groups and gatherings. The expectations may also extend to the minister's spouse and family members.

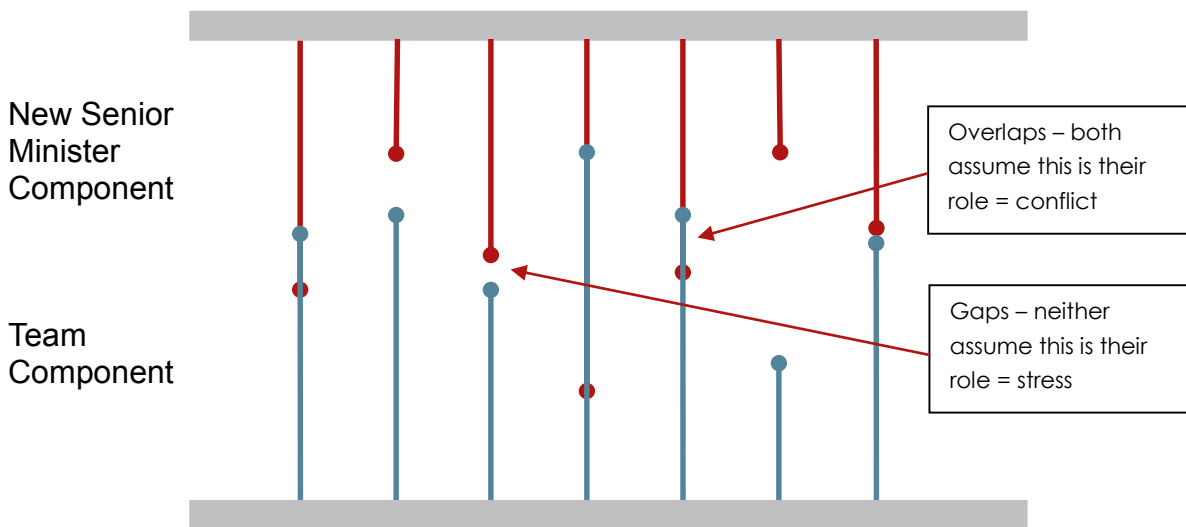
In a long incumbency or pastorate, just how all this was worked out years ago, is easily forgotten. The specific points of alignment and balance that work in this congregation are just assumed to be the way it always has been and should continue to be. Because things simply run smoothly, no one tends to ask if this is the only way or even the best way to structure tasks and roles.

A new senior minister is often chosen precisely because there is a sense they will bring something different and new to a church or parish. This they certainly will. Every minister comes with his or

her own key shaped fit which will not always match well with the key shaped slot left by the previous minister. This can be diagrammed as below.

Where both the incoming minister and the existing team, parish or congregation have the expectation that they will be responsible for certain areas of a task or role we have an **overlap** conflict. Where both expect on the basis of both parties past experience that the other will be responsible for the area; we have **gap** stress. Gaps and overlaps are not a sign of failure. They are normal 'yet to be resolved' elements of changing role and task balance and clarity.

Difficulties arise if either the minister or team/congregation find themselves unable to recognise the situation, diagnose the gaps and overlaps or to sit down and work out how to resolve them.



Pathways for resolving gap stress and overlap conflict:

1. Clearly recognise and acknowledge the situation as a normal part of adjustment to change. It is easy to fall into the two classic conflict traps of over simplification and over personalisation with this situation. Gaps and overlaps have a range of causes and are not usually anyone's fault.
2. Name and articulate each of the gaps and overlaps. Clearly diagnose each individual situation where there is a perceived gap or overlap.
3. With those involved or responsible for the task or role, talk through the possibilities for re-aligning the balance so that everyone is clear about their responsibilities and the task or role is managed in an agreed way.
4. With major gaps and overlaps, external facilitation may be required to assist with the redesign of roles and tasks or with resolving serious conflict.