reposition

Intercepting Mission Drift

Mission Drift - Part 3

Contents

This is the 3rd article in a series of 3 articles on Mission Drift. The articles describe the problem of mission drift for Christian organisations and measures that leaders can implement to prevent mission drift.

Intercepting Mission Drift

"Each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ"
(1 Corinthians 3:10-11, NIV).

The saying 'prevention is better than cure' is certainly true when it comes to addressing mission drift in Christian organisations! Indeed, the road to recovery from significant mission drift is so difficult that few Christian organisations navigate this road successfully. It is far better to negate the need to recover from mission drift by building defences that intercept our tendency towards mission drift.

This implies that leaders need to know what to prevent and also how to prevent it. It takes great skill and considerable effort to build an organisation that resists the "series of small decisions that change direction in imperceptible ways" (1).

Start with the end in mind

A good friend of mine used to speak to me about the need for leaders of organisations to 'start with the end in mind.' It seems to me that this advice is particularly relevant when it comes to building Christian organisations that withstand the tendency towards mission drift.

James Tunstead Burtchaell analysed the disengagement of North American colleges and universities from their Christian Churches and concluded that "while every one of these colleges was from the start identified with a specific church, denomination, or movement, there was no manifest intensity in that identification" (2 p. 822). Over time evangelical religion would be "replaced by a more gentle, more rational, and more socially minded Christianity" (2 p. 835).

In other words, the colleges and universities had a loose identification with a denomination that did not clarify how the organisation would serve the denomination or how the organisation fit into the denomination's works. This lack of clarity fuelled the drift away from an evangelical emphasis to a more social identity. This was evidenced by the marginalisation of theological expression at these institutions together with each institution's reconstruction of their own "self-understandings as Christian" (2 p. 824). Burtchaell wrote, "When the covenants and statements of purpose and conferences on the church relationship were produced, they served as a distraction from the fact that the turn had already passed the point of no return" (2 p. 833).

What this study highlights is the importance of starting with the end in mind if mission drift is to be effectively intercepted in the future. It is absolutely essential to achieve clarity early on about the organisational identity, the evangelical intent, the specific calling or purpose, the primary program(s), how one will resource the organisation, how the organisation will be funded, and how the organisation will be governed. Without this, the organisation will evolve without foundations. This evolution will be particularly susceptible to distortion whereby evangelical Christianity is replaced by

reposition

human spirituality and / or distraction whereby program drift makes the organisation ineffective. We do well to take heed of these dangers and to learn from Christian organisations that have established strong foundations through starting with the end in mind.

Starting with the end in mind – The Salvation Army

"The Salvation Army is an integral part of the Christian Church, although distinctive in government and practice. The Army's doctrine follows the mainstream of Christian belief and its articles of faith emphasise God's saving purposes. Its objects are 'the advancement of the Christian religion… of education, the relief of poverty, and other charitable objects beneficial to society or the community of mankind as a whole" (3 p. About Us). Althought this summary of the Salvation Army organisation is from their current web-site, the impact of the early foundations upon the current organisation is both obvious and profound.

William and Catherine Booth founded the Salvation Army in 1865 in London's east end. Under God, they established foundations that enabled the organisation to intercept mission drift over the decades that followed. They managed to lay foundations consistent with Catherine Booth's personal persuasion as "she never doubted the obligation to social service, but she believed that salvation through Jesus Christ was the purpose toward which every effort should point" (4). These foundations are clearly and obviously evident in today's organisation, notwithstanding the passage of time, changes in leadership, and the global expansion of the organisation.

The evangelical intent was evidenced by foundational decisions such as the unashamed inclusion of 'Salvation' in the very name of the organisation, the description of the organisation as an 'army,' and by a stated commitment to mainstream Christian beliefs. The specific calling and the Christlike character of the organisation was demonstrated by William Booth personally as he "gave up the comfort of his pulpit and decided to take his message into the streets where it would reach the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the destitute" (3 p. History). The particular programs were framed by the Booths' commitment to bringing 'soap, soup and salvation' to the poor and destitute (5). The governing structures were founded upon a military model with a general, officers, and soldiers.

These early foundations, in combination with the symbols such as the army uniforms and the red shield, established the solid base upon which the Salvation Army has been built. Early clarity was achieved about the need for the organisation (why do we exist?), the identity of the organisation (who are we?), the programs of the organisation (what we do?), the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders (who does what?) and how to best govern and manage the organisation (how do we keep on fulfilling our purpose?).

These early foundations enabled walls to be built that have successfully countered mission drift whilst simultaneously promoting the ongoing development of the organisation. The Christian identity and evangelical intent were established unambiguously, thereby making it difficult for drift to occur through distortion. The specific programs were framed in a manner that emphasised the particular role of the organisation, thereby limiting the likelihood of program drift.

I could have used other organisations such as Compassion and the Billy Graham Evangelistic

reposition

Association to further illustrate the importance of 'starting with the end in mind,' however the lessons are substantially the same in each instance. It is vitally important to build strong foundations early on to clarify the Christian identity of the organisation, the unique purpose of the organisation, and the framework for running the organisation.

Starting with the end in mind – Useful questions

It may well be that the organisation you work for or support is not a young organisation. Even if it has been going for a number of decades it is useful for leaders to consider how clearly the 'end in mind' has been established. Here is a tool to help you attain a realistic sense of how well the 'end in mind' has been established:

Starting with the end in mind	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
The organisation's purpose is clearly stated			
The organisation's purpose is clearly understood internally			
The organisation's purpose is clearly understood externally			
The organisation has clearly defined programs			
The organisation executes its programs very well			
External stakeholders can tell you what the organisation does			
The organisation hires people that fit in with the purpose			
Leadership are passionate about the gospel			
Christians value working for the organisation			
The organisation is clear about how the organisation is funded			
Remuneration policies and guidelines are clearly understood			
External parties respect the organisation for its stewardship			

'Agree' answers indicate the 'end in mind' has been well established, while a number of 'partially agree' and 'disagree' answers indicate there is an unacceptable level of ambiguity relating to the organisation's identity, purpose, programs, resourcing policies, and funding structures. This ambiguity promotes mission drift through distortion and / or distraction.

Building with the end in mind

While 'starting with the end in mind' establishes a promising foundation, it is essential to keep on 'building with the end in mind.' A friend of mine reinforces this point with his call for 'constant vigilance and diligence' in the fight against mission drift. This reminds us that the threat is ever-present and the fight is never-ending.

Building with the end in mind – 'Embed the Mission Statement'

Compassion is a wonderful example of a Christian organisation that has built, and that continues to build, effective defences to withstand mission drift through distortion and distraction. One of the ways they achieve this is through their ongoing commitment to making the mission statement real and relevant for all stakeholders. To this end, management gives sustained attention to embedding Compassion's mission into its messages, its programs, and its structures.

reposition

David Dahlin, Executive Vice President at Compassion International, writes "Our mission is our enduring purpose. It describes why we exist, what we are passionate about and what our programs are meant to accomplish. It's summed up in the phrase, 'Releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name'" (6). Whilst most organisations draw attention to their mission statements, very few executives speak about their mission statement with David's conviction. It is instructive to consider how Compassion has embedded their mission statement into the fabric of their organisation.

Keeping the founder's vision alive
Compassion is now over 60 years old as an organisation. They have embedded the founder's story into their purpose, their programs, their governance structures, and their messages so that it is easy for all stakeholders to see this thread from start to the present. This inextricable link to the founder is evidenced in their web-sites (7), their promotional videos (8), and indeed in much of the internal and external communications developed by Compassion. This is clearly expressed in their web-site communication which emphasises that "Compassion's work has grown from modest beginnings in South Korea in 1952 when American evangelist Rev. Everett Swanson felt compelled to help 35 children orphaned by the Korean conflict. Today we have a worldwide ministry where more than 1.2 million children are now reaping the benefits of one man's clear, God-given vision" (7).

By continually emphasising the organisation's roots, the evangelical intent of the founder is constantly reinforced, as is the specific social problem of children in need that the founder responded to with God generated compassion. This 'remembering' helps the organisation to withstand mission drift and provides guiderails for the ongoing development of the organisation.

Making clear what the mission means
One of the problems with a concise mission statement is that brevity leaves room for interpretation. To make matters worse, the specific words used in mission statements often mean different things to different people, thereby causing ambiguity in relation to the organisation's purpose and programs. This is fertile ground for mission drift where the unclarified use of expressions such as 'Christian organisation,' 'holistic,' 'word and deed,' or 'human needs' promotes ambiguity and distortion. To make matters worse, mission statements are often silent on the way in which the organisation executes its mission, which promotes program ambiguity and distraction.

Compassion is an organisation that works hard at removing ambiguity. For example, their identity, purpose, programs, and motivation are implicit in the Compassion logo and slogan which reads "Releasing children from poverty, Compassion, in Jesus name" (7). In just 8 words the specific social purpose and the evangelical motivation are set out in such a way that all stakeholders can readily appreciate what the organisation does and why it does what it does.

This journey towards clarity is an outstanding feature of Compassion's development over the years since the organisation was founded. In recent years, Compassion took yet another step to remove the potential for ambiguity by documenting Compassion's Ministry Philosophy Series. This series of booklets expands upon what Compassion means when they talk about 'Poverty' (9), 'Church' (10) and 'Partnership' (11). In this way, misunderstandings are minimised and the specific work that Compassion engages in is clarified. This level of clarification helps the organisation withstand

re**position**

pressures to modify the Compassion identity and programs based on different interpretations of poverty, church, and partnership.

Building with the end in mind – 'Embed the organisation's distinctiveness'

Christian organisations make a grave mistake when they drift from their specific calling by taking on the identity and programs of other organisations.   African Enterprise evidenced this drift with their incremental move away from urban evangelism towards aid and development.   "The work was committed to holism and to 'word and deed', but so big now were the aid, social care and development projects and with such huge sums of money going to them, that it seemed to Michael (Michael Cassidy – founder) and others that AE was almost starting to usurp in places the work and role of World Vision, yet without the organisational gifting and resources of the latter organisation" (12 p. 496).

To work against this temptation to drift, Compassion emphasises 'what makes us distinct' (14) with language and expressions that can be understood by all. They unapologetically highlight their commitment to Christ together with their commitment to children, commitment to church and their commitment to integrity. They briefly elaborate on each of these distinctive characteristics in a way that provides meaningful guiderails for the work they do, how they do this work, who they employ and who they partner with. In this way, Compassion reinforces its uniqueness and specific function within the broader Christian community.

Building with the end in mind – 'Embed an unashamed proclamation of the gospel'

Regrettably some organisations dress the gospel in clothing aimed at acceptance by the broader population. Compassion has resisted this temptation.

Compassion's commitment to the gospel and to evangelism is obvious to all stakeholders. The Compassion logo has 'in Jesus name' embedded in it, something that can only be changed through unanimous vote of the International Board on 3 consecutive board meetings (13). Their distinctive characteristics set out 'commitment to Christ' as the foundational organisational commitment that drives their identity, purpose, programs and hires (14). The home page of the Compassion web-site records the number of people that have come to Christ during the year, and also the number of partner churches and sponsored children (15).

These are examples of how Compassion has embedded an unashamed declaration of allegiance to Christ together with a commitment to evangelise. We do well to emulate their commitment.

Building with the end in mind – 'Embed the right partnerships'

Many Christian charities use statements such as 'in partnership with the church' to describe who they look to for support and also how they execute their programs. Very few Christian Charities define what they mean by 'partnership' or what they mean by 'church.' The outcome is that partnerships remain undefined, characterised by unclear roles with vague responsibilities. These types of 'partnerships' are ineffective, and they promote disorganisation.

reposition

The way in which Compassion defines their distinct 'commitment to the church' (14) is a helpful example of how to embed the right partnerships. Their guiding statement is "The Church is God's chosen instrument to bring hope to a hurting world and to deliver justice to the poor and oppressed. That's why Compassion works exclusively in partnership with local churches in developing nations to deliver a holistic child development program" (14). In this brief statement, Compassion is clear about their primary partnership and the motivation behind their commitment to the local church. In supporting documents, Compassion clarifies what they mean by 'local church' with a particular emphasis on the local church being "a dynamic community of disciple-making people empowered by the Holy Spirit" (10 p. 7).

To take this further, Compassion have embedded their partnership with the local church into their programs. Today Compassion relies on over 5,000 international church partners to deliver their child sponsorship program to over 1,000,000 children. What's more, the evangelical character of these local church partners is evident in the 160,000 children and mothers who invited Christ to be their Saviour over the past year (15). There is no room for vague partnership concepts, but rather a practical delivery model that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of Compassion International, the Compassion Global Partner Office, the local church, the sponsor, and the child who is being sponsored. Indeed, Compassion gives diligent attention to defining who does what.

What about your organisation? Have the right partnerships being selected and defined? Are these partnerships effective? Are the roles and responsibilities clearly defined and practical? These are important questions that warrant review and action.

Building with the end in mind – 'Embed the programs the organisation is good at'
One of the sad outcomes of mission drift is that organisations end up embedding programs and activities that they are not good at! This leads to a downward spiral characterised by diluted effort, disorganisation, discouragement, and even despair.

The advice to 'stick to the knitting' (16) is useful for those entrusted with leading a Christian organisation. Compassion, the Salvation Army, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Organisation are good examples of Christian organisations that have built on what they do well. They understand their particular role within the greater body of Christ and they keep at it.

Compassion has a limited number of programs and their primary program continues to be the Compassion Child Sponsorship Program. In recent years they have almost doubled the number of children participating in this program. This growth was made easier by the fact that Compassion continues to replicate and refine a proven delivery model. Looking to the future, Compassion is committed to increasing the participants from just over 1,000, 000 to 4,000,000 by 2020 (13).

What makes this extraordinary vision achievable is the fact that Compassion will continue to expand a program that they already deliver exceptionally well. They will leverage their cumulative experience, historic investment, current support model, and current delivery model to meet future challenges. No silver bullet needed – just ongoing and careful development of what they are already good at!

Although the Salvation Army has a broad range of programs and support raising initiatives, they have successfully embedded these into their organisation and into the communities that the Salvation Army serves. Their programs, such as their Homeless programs, Addiction programs, the Red Shield Appeal and the Christmas Lunch ministry are well known, well executed, and well accepted. This acceptance is a strong indication of public respect for what the organisation represents and does. It is remarkable that the Salvation Army has universal name recognition and deep public trust notwithstanding the fact that many do not align with the evangelical intent of the organisation. Gwen Purtill captures the basis for this public trust when she emphasises how the Salvation Army provides the public with a "fixed point for others in the middle of chaos" (4).   This fixed point is strongly linked to the character of the organisation and the specific programs that the organisation has executed well over many decades.

The underlying message here is that a limited number of programs, repetition, and cumulative experience are conducive to building an effective organisation. Embedding what the organisation is good at will help prevent distraction and disorganisation.

Building with the end in mind – 'Embed resistance to mission drift'

Everything that I have written about 'building with the end in mind' will help build the organisation's resistance against mission drift. These additional comments relate to the ongoing management and governance of the organisation.

Board of Directors

Mission drift often starts in the boardroom. Typically, this starts with an ill-conceived idea about a new program that does not fit the organisation's purpose or competencies, or a subtle push to play down the evangelical intent of the organisation in order to facilitate alternative funding sources. What can be done to minimise the potential for mission drift in the boardroom?

1.   Recruit Christians that value the evangelical intent and purpose of the organisation
2.   Get mission drift on the agenda as a regular and high priority agenda item
3.   Changes to the Christian purpose to require unanimous boardroom approval
4.   Ensure an effective risk management process precedes board approval of a new program
5.   Annual business plans to be reviewed by the board for signs of mission drift
6.   Board to determine employment policies that support the Christian purpose
7.   Unanimous board approval required to approve a funding source that restricts evangelism
8.   Ensure prayer is a high priority agenda item

Executive Management Team

As many Christian organisations are loosely governed, mission drift is most often caused by unwise decisions made by management. These decisions can be significant turning points but they are normally incremental decisions that promote mission drift over time.

What can be done to minimise the potential for mission drift in the executive team?

1.   Recruit Christians that value the evangelical intent and purpose of the organisation
2.   The board must govern by setting policy direction for the executive with effective oversight
3.   Get mission drift on the agenda for the executive management team meetings

reposition

4.   Proposed changes to the Christian identity and programs to be escalated for board review
5.   Ensure prayer is a high priority agenda item

Final Comments

There is no magic formula for intercepting mission drift. In this broken world, even Christian organisations will have a tendency towards distortion and disorganisation. What is needed is intentional interception and careful construction day in and day out. Paul reminds us that "Each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11, NIV).

Bibliography

1. Reed, Larry. Keeping the Faith. June 2001.

2. Burtchaell, James Tunstead. The Dying of the Light. Grand Rapids : Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

3. The Salvation Army Internationsl. http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/Mission. The Salvation Army International. [Online] 2012. [Cited: 12 05 2013.] http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/Mission.

4. The Most Effective Organisation in the U.S. - The Salvation Army and Peter Drucker. Purtill, Gwen. April, Washington : Terence Scanlon for Capital Research Centre, 2002, Vol. Compassion and Culture.

5. Benge, Janet Benge & George. Christian Heroes, Then and Now: William Booth - Soup, Soap and Salvation. s.l. : YWAM Publishing, 2002.

6. Dahlin, David. Our Mission Statement Expaned and Explained. blog.compassion.coml. [Online] Compassion International, 2013. [Cited: 15 05 2013.] http://blog.compassion.com/help-a-child-our-mission-statement-expanded-and-explained/.

7. Compassion International, History. Compassion.com. [Online] Compassion International, 2013. [Cited: 20 May 2013.] http://www.compassion.com/history.htm .

8. Compassion International. youtube. Youtube.com. [Online] Compassion International, 20 February 2009. [Cited: 20 May 2013.] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFz66jyqXWs&list=PLm2x72wDBJxKqnUrdRS2nsWwt1fKysS61&index=2 .

reposition

9. Todd, Scott. Poverty, Compassion's Ministry Philosophy Series. Colorado Springs : Compassion International, 2010. ISBN 978-0-9841169-6-6.

10. Compassion's Global Executive Leadership Team. Church, Compassion's Ministry Philosophy Series. Colorado Springs : Compassion International, 2011. ISBN 978-1-936899-05-0.

11. Compassion Global Executive Leadership Team. Partnership, Compassion's Ministry Philosophy Series. Colorado Springs : Compassion International, 2011. ISBN 978-1-936899-09-8.

12. Cassidy, Michael. African Harvest. s.l. : Monarch Books, June 2003. p. 496.

13. Interview by Tami Heim. Finishing Well. Outcomes. Spring 2013, p. 7.

14. Compassion International. What Makes Us Distinct. Compassion.com. [Online] Compassion International, 2013. [Cited: 20 May 2013.] http://www.compassion.com/about/what-makes-us-distinct.htm.

15. —. Compassion Home. Compassion.com. [Online] Compassion International, 2013. [Cited: 20 May 2013.] http://www.compassion.com/default.htm.

16. Waterman, Thomas J. Peters & Robert H. In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies. New York : Harper Business Essentials, 2004. ISBN 0-06-054878-9.

17. Video. UnitingCareAgeing - Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy. http://www.unitingcareageing.org.au. [Online] 13 11 2012. [Cited: 13 11 2012.] http://www.unitingcareageing.org.au/chaplaincy_and_pastoral_care/chaplaincy_and_pastoral_care_video.

18. African Enterprise International Home. African Enterprise International. [Online] 2012. [Cited: 21 11 2012.] http://aeinternational.org/australia/ .

19. The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia . Uniting Church in Australia Assembly. [Online] Copyright 2012. [Cited: 27 11 2012.] http://www.uca.org.au/basisofunion.htm#the basis of union.

20. Christian Science Board of Directors. christianscience.com/what is christian science. christianscience.com. [Online] 2012. [Cited: 29 11 2012.] http://christianscience.com/what-is-christian-science/what-about-jesus.

21. Various. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Salvation_Army. http://en.wikipedia.org. [Online] Wikimedia, 2013. [Cited: 12 May 2013.] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Salvation_Army.

22. Todd, Scott. Poverty, Compassion's Ministry Philosophy Series. Colorado Springs : COmpassion International, 2010. ISBN 978-0-9841169-6-6.