

Susanna Wesley Foundation Conference 2017 - *Changing Church* **Case Study: Christian Aid - *From “Them and Us” to “We”***

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Background Context

The Supporter and Community Partnerships Department (SPD) within Christian Aid is responsible for inspiring new and existing supporters to provide financial support, take part in campaign actions and pray for the work of partners across the world. In 2013, this department consisted of 3 main divisions: central Communications and Fundraising teams and a Regions and Nations team responsible for building face-to-face relationships with supporters across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

In the 50 years since it was created, Christian Aid has consistently grown in its ability to respond to the needs of the poor. This has slowed in recent years as household incomes have declined. There has also been increasing scepticism of international development charities, with the media highlighting the salaries of Chief Executives, unpalatable telephone and street fundraising practices, and pushing for more funds to be spent closer to home.

By 2013, these external pressures were drawing attention to some historical tensions within the organisation, particularly between central fundraising teams based in London and those teams based in the English regions. Tired old stories circulated, characterising central fundraising teams as cash hungry vultures who would do anything for a £3/month regular gift, and regional staff as “nice” people who enjoy cups of tea with local vicars but have no grasp of the overall financial situation. ***At a time when there was a need to respond creatively and collaboratively to a challenging external context, internal frustrations were limiting the ability of team members to work together to find fresh, locally relevant new approaches to raising funds.***

A staff survey had also highlighted some serious misgivings about leadership within the English regions, with many staff feeling limited in their roles and frustrated by management behaviours.

So, how did Christian Aid approach the challenge?

The Departmental Director commissioned an internal review to better understand the nature of the problem. This focused on ways of working and the leadership and management culture, which had allowed certain

behaviours to continue. This review was led by an internal consultant who met with representatives from teams in both London and across the regions; spending time listening to people, asking questions and exploring with them how to work through their challenges.

What process was followed/what activities were undertaken?

Building on recommendations from the review, the Director proposed a significant restructure of the leadership team of the England Division, moving away from a hierarchical, top-down management structure to a flatter management model. The role of this team was not just to make decisions but rather to enable an environment where colleagues across the region could work together to collaborate and try new and creative fundraising approaches.

Following a formal consultation process, final decisions were made and implemented, creating a new leadership team formed of individuals with the newly required skills and experience. As the requirements of the new roles were significantly different to the previous roles, existing post-holders were placed at risk of redundancy and had to apply for the new positions. A number were successfully promoted to these positions, a few were not.

Please describe any notable features, events or stages of the process

Once all the positions were filled, a change programme was developed to respond to the specific needs highlighted within the review process. This programme, which stretched over 18 months, consisted of workshops, team meetings, individual performance discussions, coaching and training. Structured spaces were set aside to build more honest and respectful dialogue between teams. In collaboration with their teams, the England leadership team built a fresh new vision and purpose. The leadership team also developed a performance framework creating a more objective shared understanding of what “good” looked like. A new management information tool was created to give wider access to information in order to inform collective decision making.

What outcomes were achieved?

The changing external context makes it hard to compare results in terms of income but in the period immediately following the changes, there was an increase in the numbers of churches engaging in Christian Aid activities and a hugely successful new Christmas campaign.

Most notably, there was a significant shift in the culture of the department. Immediately following this change process, the wider organisation took

part in a global downsizing exercise. It was notable how well the new leadership team worked together and with others to respond to these challenges in a mature, creative and collaborative way. This would not have been possible had the same exercise taken place prior to this culture change programme.

It was also impressive to see how individual members of regional teams, newly inspired and equipped with better information, responded passionately and intelligently to the need for difficult choices.

Looking back, what have you and/or Christian Aid learned about change from the experience?

Many of the changes in the England Division would not have been possible without some painful choices around the suitability of some individuals for leadership roles in the changing context. That notwithstanding, it was the **focus on addressing specific behaviours and working culture that had the most impact.** By setting out clear intentions and aspirations for how to work together, it became easier to identify when unhelpful habits slipped back in. Particular attention was paid to building more adult-to-adult ways of relating between teams, where people learned to speak more honestly, raising their concerns constructively and respectfully.

Many of the unhelpful rumours and stories had been formed on the basis of subjective opinions, driven by personality and limited information. In addition to helping people build stronger working relationships, it was also important to provide everyone with quick and easy access to management information. By developing tools that gave equal access to income and fundraising figures, it became easier to discuss the facts from a more objective viewpoint.

There was considerable pressure at the outset of the restructure to focus on task delivery, rather than on the longer term aims of building trust, listening and strengthening the overall culture of working. There were many times when people wanted the changes to take place faster and for decisions to be made more quickly. Holding the space for changes to happen at the right pace was a very important component of the change process.

There is an African proverb which states: “If you want to fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”



Esther Stevenson is an independent leadership and organisational development consultant. She learned her craft as a senior manager at Christian Aid, where she worked on strategy, leadership development and organisational change across Africa, Central Asia, and more recently in the UK. She holds a degree from the University of York and an MSc in International

Development Studies, where her dissertation was on gender and education. Her ongoing area of interest is management innovation, and encouraging leaders to be more authentic, embracing a more reflective and contemplative approach.