

REPORT TO YFC/INCEDO JUNE/JULY 2007

Brief given

To undertake a brief review of the change process, in particular seeking to understand what has, in fact, actually changed. And to make some tentative observations about the future issues Incedo might have to grapple with.

Interviews

I spoke with approximately twenty of the current YFC/Incedo members – a mixture of longtime staff, former and current MLT members, volunteer, part-time and full timers. Over half of these conversations were face-to-face, the remaining ones being phonecalls.

Initial impressions

- I was very impressed with the quality of people involved.
- Strong expressed commitment to the values and practices of the mission – seemed to have been imbibed and internalized.
- Overall there was a positivity about the change process – the need for it to happen and how it happened.
- More hopeful and optimistic about the future of YFC/Incedo than fearful and pessimistic.
- Largely positive about the shrinkage of staffing/membership/programmes – most people seeing the need for this to happen, rather than becoming fearful of being on a ‘sinking ship’.
- Relational warmth and interconnection between members in various centres seemed refreshingly positive, even though most spent limited time relating to others from out-of-town. National events were warmly anticipated, rather than reluctantly attended.
- Streamlining and minimizing of structures (boards, admin, processes, offices etc) has occurred, making a much less cumbersome and much more organic organization.

Given the magnitude of change in the past three years, these things are certainly worth celebrating. The move toward a becoming a nationwide intentional mission community has been significantly advanced.

OBSERVATIONS, QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Transfer of leadership

While clearly not without pain and stress, the transfer of leadership from one generation to another is remarkable. If only other organizations could learn from this.

Darryl, Gus and Mal (in particular) along with other senior staffers, are to be applauded for their courage and open-handedness. Their fierce determination to transition out of the key decision making roles, without exiting the mission altogether is admirable. It has also likely minimized the level of pain and disorientation that YFC has experienced. If the

mission can find ways of continuing to draw on their experience, wisdom and mentoring skills, without deferring to them in times of decision, then Incedo will, I believe, significantly improve its chances of a bright future.

(Note: I recognize that the transfer is still not fully complete and that the challenges have only just begun for the new MLT, now that Darryl has exited it.)

The challenges of a less generic and structured mission

In the inevitable (and largely good) swing from a highly programmatic/structured and generic approach to the mission, to one that is much more relational, organic and flexible, there will need to be some keen application of strategic thinking at work. Otherwise the mission may quickly end up back at a similar point to where it previously perceived itself to be – engaged in lots of good activity, but failing to give its core energy to its central mission – reaching unchurched young people.

By strategic I am not referring to ‘strategic plans’ – formalized plans of action which can often seem to straightjacket and bureaucratize an organization. While such formalized plans may well play a part, I’m using the word ‘strategic’ to essentially mean the capacity of individual members, teams and the whole mission to train themselves to keep asking the question “how does what I am doing today, this week, this year, contribute to my/our mission?” “How does it fit in? – Does it fit in?” Strategic thinking has to do with intentionality and focus.

It seems to me that the more longer-serving members have probably learnt to think and operate strategically and critically. However, it is probably not a natural, instinctive way of working for most people. Given that the future of Incedo lies in discerning ways of genuinely connecting with unchurched young people, and that in an unstructured environment there is lots of opportunity to get lost in just ‘going with the flow’, having people within the movement who will ask the hard questions is going to be critical.

This is where mentoring is vital. None of us can (or should) determine what we put our energies into, by ourselves. Mentoring is primarily about *asking* the right questions – not about having the questions *answered* for us.

Younger leaders within the mission will have to **want** this type of input. Imposed mentoring generally doesn’t work. But when a person sees their desperate need for others to help them think critically and strategically, they will willingly seek out the help of others. My gut feeling is that most mentoring will have to come from within the mission – as what is required are people who will ask the hard questions – ones that will force us to go outside our natural comfort zones. Most people who could play this role from outside Incedo, may lack the priority of mission that is key to this becoming more than just a pastoral or spiritual direction role (as necessary as these types of support also are).

There is, of course, a creative tension between learning to be disciplined, intentional and strategic, and seeking to be Spirit-led. While they are certainly not opposites, we must not

mistake being Spirit-led as an absence of discipline, hard work, critical thinking and focus.

This is one of the challenges, I think. Such living is hard work. It requires knowing when to be hard on ourselves and when to go easy. It needs discernment regarding what plans to hold lightly and what to hold fast to.

It's understandable that at this stage in the change process there is some degree of uncertainty about what relating/activity 'fits' Incedo and what doesn't. This was expressed to me a number of times by members. However, over the next couple of years one would hope that some clarity would come and that every member would be able to articulate what elements of their regular week/month/year are a core outworking of the Incedo mission as well as those that express the values of Incedo but do not necessarily outwork the central mission.

Building team

Building team in the mission – at the national, regional and local levels is clearly a goal that the new model of YFC is looking to promote. That's great. Partnership and community are critical to mission.

A consistent theme I sensed, for many in centres where there are few members, was the tendency to isolationism. I sensed that it was becoming a real issue for some at the extremities – one that, in spite of their desire to hang in there, will eventually endanger their capacity to remain in the mission. Compounding this was a struggle for many to build and grow team in their locality. Often I heard there were many helpers (who frequently seemed to be project-based) but few people they could genuinely call partners in the mission – people who were also passionate about mission to young people. Some of this is probably a natural result of the de-structuring that has occurred and the dismantling of programmes.

On the national and regional level the interconnectedness seems to have increased over the last couple of years. Incedo has clearly made some big strides toward becoming more of a nationwide community. The national events and the more frequent contact were welcomed and embraced. Ethos, Surge and the Gathering were spoken about warmly and people seemed genuinely keen to attend such events – a good sign. Plus, where personal initiatives such as visiting other centres occurred it was warmly received and valued – by both hosts and guests. This can only help build a sense of team and partnership across the areas. Likewise the electronic contacts (email, prayer guides, online forums etc), in spite of their sometime limited use.

However, such efforts require time and energy. All members (but particularly the part-time or voluntary ones) will find investing in these points of connection more regularly, difficult to maintain. Plus, I question whether these type of connections will ever be enough to sustain and nurture someone who is largely chipping away at things by themselves. No doubt there are some personalities and temperaments that survive in such

circumstances. However, for most people I think the wear-down effect will take its toll. You can't just build team nationally. I don't think it's sustainable.

So there's really two issues here. One has to do with where members find their support, encouragement and weekly partners-in-mission from. How much of this is feasible at a distance? With the shrinkage in membership, are people so thinly spread across the country now that consideration might need to be given to some members moving locale in order to create stronger regular teams?

The second has to do with the ongoing need of members to build teams of volunteers. Is the struggle many seem to be experiencing with this, mainly the result of the destructuring and the uncertainty potential volunteers now live with (ie "where can I get involved?")? When everything is in flux it is difficult for people to find a way to be involved. Or to what degree is one's survival/success as a member dependent on one's ability to inspire others and build team? What about those who are more team players than initiators/pioneers/team leaders? Is there a place for them? If so, what place?

Shared ownership and decision-making

My impression was that many members were unclear about Incedo's decision-making process. In fact, confusion seemed to be the order of the day. Some thought the MLT was there to make all the key decisions. Others felt frustrated with a perceived lack of consultation (CTC and the name change were two regular examples used). Others felt that consultation had been attempted (ie opportunity was given) but that members either didn't respond, or responded after the fact.

When I asked some members what kind of decisions they felt the MLT needed to consult on, most struggled to comment – though one person suggested that those decisions that had potentially involved a change in direction and/or involved initiatives that everyone was expected to be a part of should involve the most consultation – a good point, I thought.

Clarifying *what* type of decisions need to have consultation would be helpful. And what level and type of consultation. Decision making has clearly been streamlined (which is great) but if people lack clarity and buy-in about the processes, shared ownership will be still be limited. And this is important. For it seems to me that the kind of missional community you're seeking to build requires all members to be proactive and to take the initiative – to carry shared responsibility for the movement (not just locally, but nationally). The tendency to be passive consumers is bred in us at an early age and most churches of course, encourage this approach. So did the old YFC model (at least at the national level).

So determining what level of collaborative decision making should occur is, I think, important. What are the limits to such consultation (particularly bearing in mind the issues of limited time face-to-face as a community, lack of time for those members who

are volunteers or part-time, and the inevitable variety of ‘zones of indifference’ – what is important for one person may not be important to another)?

Of course, there is a responsibility on the whole community to grow in their ownership of the mission, in ways other than just decision-making. Some encouraging signs I heard about were a member (Rory?) suggesting online forums about issues and then actioning it, another offering a vehicle to another mission base, and several others helping out members from other areas in various ways. More of these “let’s not just leave it to the MLT” should be celebrated and encouraged.

(Incidentally, an excellent book that might be worth people reading is Patrick Lencioni’s “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” Jossey-Bass, 2002.)

SUMMARY

The next two years are clearly going to be telling, regarding the future of Incedo. There is an understandable fragility about the mission at present. It has the potential to grow and develop. But it also could well wither and die. Some of the issues I have raised in this report may be critical in determining the shape of the mission’s future. So too will be its capacity to begin to attract, grow and develop other leaders.

However, I write this report with significant apprehension and caution. They’re only impressions and observations from brief conversations, so my assessments are very tentative. I may well have missed some key stuff and might also be misreading some intuitive signals. So please don’t take this as anything like a conclusive or comprehensive analysis!

Finally, let me express both my admiration for the courage you all have shown in walking down this track, in embracing the inherent risks, and in seeking to become a more focused and missional community. All power to you.

Regards
Wayne Kirkland