

Reflections on DLCs and LCs in general

Encouraging Everyday Faith - 30 September 2021

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Points 1-5 are for teams and participants in Discipleship Learning Communities that ran as part of the SGPF work; 6-9 are more general observations on Learning Communities

1. Team clarity

Teams having ownership and clarity about what THEY want to get out of the LCs makes them more effective - they are driving what they want to learn from others / prepared to share what they are learning between events. So do some work together on this before you come. Find out where each of you start from, make expectations clear.

2. Sponsor clarity

Clear sponsorship of the team and their purpose is crucial. If you walk into the room being unclear "what is being asked of you" that is your responsibility. Sort it out beforehand in discussion with your sponsor; what permissions have you got? Secure permission to challenge, then use it. And renegotiate it to confirm.

Of course, it is brilliant when the diocesan bishop is in the room. But if your senior sponsor is not present, you have to do the work beforehand to prevent that hamstringing you.

So in DLC we saw significant differences between teams that had got further with these two - team clarity and sponsor clarity - before they got in the room. But if there was a general weakness across teams - amid their enthusiasm, passion and expertise - it was in these areas. That is perhaps a symptom of the general CofE weakness of not pushing in conversations to get clarity. "Exactly what are we doing here?" On a bad day, we veer towards ambiguous synthesis.

3. Exactly what do you want to be different?

Be ruthlessly clear as an outcome of the LC work exactly who you want to do what differently as a result of your work. Hence the 'people' exercise at DLC - who do you want to be thinking, feeling, saying, acting, differently as a result of your work. And exactly what do you want this difference to be?

4. Channels of influence

How will your work achieve this change - what are the channels of influence that you will use to try to achieve this change - and how will you know if it is happening (measurement!)

We observe a certain flabbiness in church land because it is difficult to get your hands around it. Hence, we fall back on generalities in which we 'wish the church was different'. This is especially tough at DLC within SGPF. Very ambitious because it has been talked about within the CofE to little effect for so long; and because the DLC teams are several steps removed from end prize - Christians being more confident as followers of Jesus in their Everyday place.

5. If this is (some form of) team learning (vs an LC for individuals), it needs a focal person in the team/leader who will galvanise/pull it together/be persistent.

General observations

6. How LCs offer stretch and growth

The balance of input vs sharing: there is a bit of 'we don't know what we don't know' - and how to raise the bar - and how to position external input / who translates it into CofE context.

Connected to this is how to select the teams to facilitate maximum learning value - is it better to have teams in a similar place or teams who are at really different stages? It depends on context. E.g. If teams are all addressing a similar crisis and focused then similar may be better.

For the DLCs we had a range: i.e. teams who are long way down the track may have more valuable things to share - this runs the risk of some finding it frustrating that they aren't learning as much / being stretched.

7. Balancing clear aims with time to reflect

Like coaching. It ranges between 'Time to Think' - reflections / sense making of current challenges, whatever they may be vs clear direction of travel - clear actions, progress updates etc. LCs can be like this, but are better when there is both - and that teams are in the midst of some change / transformation process that is supported by coming together to compare notes with others.

8. More than a programme but make use of the programme toolkit

This sort of deep cultural change is sooooo much more than a programme. Nick S has been very clear on that. But it needs elements of programme and the toolkit - the focus, disciplines etc - to get traction and avoid our floating into ungrounded generalities.

9. Lack of CofE wide distillation of LC experience

LCs work well in the CofE because they accommodate the need for (some!) consistency and the need for diocesan and parish/WCs 'autonomy' (note 'autonomy' can't not be the right word in the body of Christ). And there are a good number of these so at present you can't throw a prayer book without hitting an LCs. But little investment in CofE wide distillation of what is/isn't working well - e.g. lots of LCS with clergy; with church leadership teams, with dioceses. But no one person owns responsibility for bringing it together. NCIs under too much pressure to fill that space fully at present. Hence very grateful for this being an aspect of today's agenda.

So, it is incumbent upon anybody who is running/sponsoring LCs to find others and share learning. Let's keep doing that.