

Building ON OUR strengths

ARTICLE TWO Releasing our potential Effective Structures

// compiled by Liam Glover

The previous article in this series revealed results from Natural Church Development (NCD) research in more than 1,800 corps from 20 countries around the world. It showed that as a movement our best-developed characteristic is Need-oriented Evangelism and one of the least developed is Holistic Small Groups. But here comes a surprise: Holistic Small Groups is not the least developed quality characteristic in the international Salvation Army. Rather, that 'honour' goes to Effective Structures!

'Surely that can't be right,' is the reaction met with again and again when presenting such results. The reaction is one of disbelief followed by the statement, 'We must be the most structured church anywhere.' Well that may or may not be true, but we should be aware that the NCD survey does not look at how structured we are, but rather how effective our structures are.

WHAT is meant by effective? You could say that what is measured is: to what degree our structures help us to do and become what we state we intend to do and become. You could also say that it was the opinion of committed, key members of 1,800 corps from 20 countries that the organisational structure of their church hinders church life rather than promotes it (see www.ncdinthesalvationarmy.net).

Why care about structures?

Why waste time thinking about structures and their effectiveness? Are we not about saving souls, growing saints and serving suffering humanity? Yes we are and that is why, whether we like or not, the issue about effective structures is important – especially for The Salvation Army.

If you have been introduced to NCD in any way, you probably will have ►

Releasing OUR potential

► seen the barrel with staves of different lengths. With this picture in mind, Need-oriented Evangelism is the longest stave, and no matter how much longer we make it, the water – or God's blessing – will continue to flow out of the barrel at the shortest stave. In other words our 'salvation capacity', our disciple-making potential, is limited not by our lack of outreach but by our lack of effective structures (and holistic small groups). Likewise, if we want to increase that potential, the answer is not to focus more on evangelistic outreach but to intentionally and deliberately attend to those two areas where 'the water is leaking'.

Structures are many things, but armed with the massive research of NCD we decided to see whether one of those characteristic 'Army' structures, our appointment system, has any influence on the overall health and quality of our movement. Or rather, to be more specific, we asked ourselves whether, based on empirical evidence, we can say if our culture of relative short stays for corps officers has any effect on the health of a corps; and if so, is this effect positive or negative?

Long or short tenure?

The short answer is that we can empirically confirm the effect relatively short appointments have on health and that the effect is negative.

We divided all 1,800 corps that conducted an NCD survey into two groups, depending on whether the corps officer had been in the corps more or less than five years and then compared the average quality of the corps in each group. The result (*seen below*) is clear: the average health of a corps with 'long tenure' (where officers have been more than five years) is significantly higher, than in corps with 'short tenure' (where officers have been less than five years). What does it actually mean? It means, among other things, that the potential for making disciples and seeing them become engaged in the ministry of the corps is higher; it means the corps is more likely to experience sustainable growth; it means the corps is likely to be more engaged in its local community; is more likely to plant another corps; and that the giving probably is greater.



Centring the NCD Process



What is the relationship between corps officer tenure and corps health?

NCD
Average

49

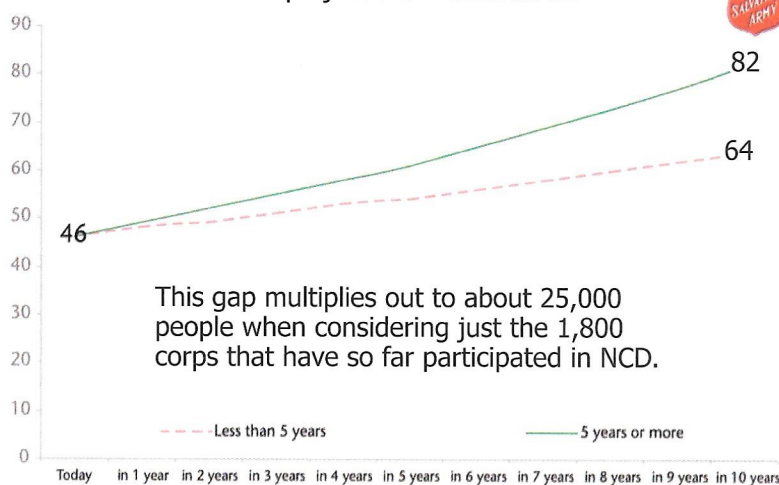
At corps less
than 5 years

57

At corps
5 years or more

We can also explain the difference by comparing the growth projection of an imaginary median-sized corps based on the average health of a 'short tenure' and a 'long tenure' corps (*see below*). While an additional 18 in average attendance after 10 years may not seem that impressive in itself, it might help to be reminded that it is an additional increase in attendance of more than 28 per cent, or that in real figures it would multiply out to approximately 25,000 more people, just for the 1,800 corps that so far have conducted an NCD survey. This may sound like 'playing the numbers game', but when we know that the higher the quality of a corps is, the higher the percentage of conversion growth is, then these are not numbers. These are people with a greater understanding of the reality of the Kingdom of God and serving in a high-quality corps producing increasing fruit that will last.

CO tenure based projections – attendance



This gap multiplies out to about 25,000 people when considering just the 1,800 corps that have so far participated in NCD.

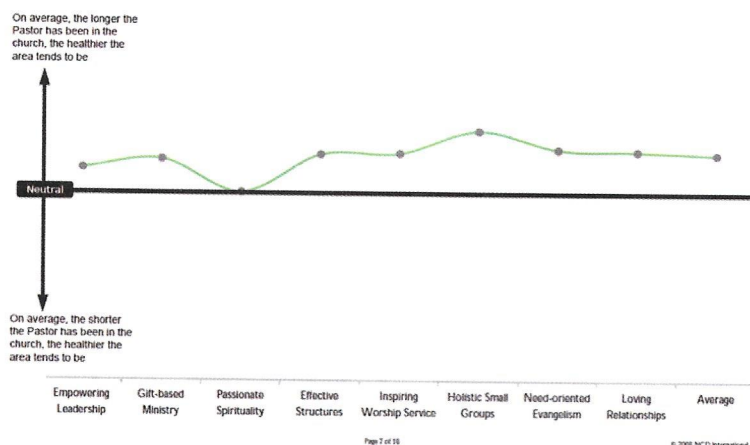
► Every area improved

It is not only the average health of a 'long tenure' corps that is higher; the same holds true for every one of the eight quality characteristics bar one, namely, *Passionate Spirituality* (see below). It seems that when an officer stays longer in a corps the leadership becomes more empowering, and relationships are more loving.

As was alluded to in the previous article, the quality characteristic most affected by officer tenure is Holistic Small Groups. In other words there is a direct link between officer tenure and the likelihood of a corps having developed Holistic Small Groups as part of its life and ministry.



Relationship between Pastor Tenure and Church Quality



Change of system or change of approach?

Please let me reiterate, there is nothing in the above that proves that our appointments system negatively affects our overall health and quality, unless of course we see our tendency to short tenures as a result of that system. However, what the empirical data does show is that short tenures for officers affect negatively our overall health and disciple-making potential and we have to seriously consider how to meet this challenge. The answer, though, is not just to lengthen all appointments to more than five years. There are other factors having the right officer in the right appointment and a change in approach and attitude. Short-term appointments naturally lead to short-term thinking. If we for generations have had tendencies to short-term thinking then the danger is we continue with that even with longer appointments. I remember our training principal, the then Colonel John Larsson, telling the cadets that all officers agree they should stay longer in their appointments and then, after a pause he added with a smile, 'just not their present one'. Longer appointments will have limited impact on the health of the Army, unless there is a qualitative long-term focus in our approach to ministry. Without this change we risk that, although officers might have longer tenure, all that results is, in effect, five or more consecutive one-year appointments at the same corps.

It is not a question of either/or, but certainly of both/and. If we are to break the limitations that lack of continuity has placed upon our disciple-making potential, then we need both a change of attitude in ourselves and in the way we use our appointment system. We need to approach our work with a long-term qualitative focus, as if we were to remain in our appointment for the next 10 years or beyond, whether we will or not. At the same time we also need to 'use' the appointment system to place the right officers in the right appointments, give them the necessary support to continually develop, and then leave them there long enough to see long-tenure quality growth.

Increasing our missional potential

These two articles have shown that The Salvation Army worldwide generally is strong and quite healthy in the area of Need-oriented Evangelism and if we want to increase our evangelistic effectiveness and disciple-making ability, the answer is not to improve and increase our outreach efforts. Rather, as shown, we should focus on the two areas which are least developed and therefore have the most potential for increased mission impact, namely Holistic Small Groups and Effective Structures.

This is not the case for every individual corps, but based on the research presented in these articles we propose it is the case for the Army internationally, territorially and divisionally. This is challenging because these are areas that we've neglected and have little experience in. Nevertheless, there are many examples from around the Army world that it can be done on a local level and the research of NCD encourages us to believe that if we focus on developing these least-developed areas, then we can expect significant increase in our missional potential, even in the relative short-term.

Let's win the world for God by doing our part!

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