

# Slow Boat to Skype

## Governing mission organisations in a new paradigm

A summary of for Global Connections

---

### Executive Summary

The world of Christian UK to global mission has changed significantly in the last 20-30 years, and continues to change at a rapid rate. There is clear evidence, in research by Paul Hildreth and others, that the context for mission organisations has changed as a result of post-colonialism, post-modernity and different profiles of church-going and commitment. Combined with current pressures on UK charities in general, this provides an imperative for UK Christian mission organisations (CMOs) to ensure that the 'slow boat' approach relevant in the past is updated to respond to the 'skype' world of today.

This paper summarises a Masters dissertation which considered the nature of UK CMOs, their capability to respond to the contextual changes and the potential implications for their governance and support. The dissertation research was undertaken with members of Global Connections. The research demonstrated that, in overall character, CMOs and their Boards are not so different from other UK charities. However, it also identified a number of areas for improvement such as greater Board diversity, widening the recruitment 'net', increased robustness of Board operation, and increased Board expertise particularly in marketing.

The research showed that many UK CMO Boards feel reasonably confident about governing, but identified a number that acknowledge *"we don't know what we don't know"*. It found that many Boards rely on their executives and staff for input on strategy and 'new thinking', and that Boards feel least confident in their capabilities to map a vision for the future. The latter finding is very significant as it is these capabilities that are necessary to respond to the current rapidly changing context.

Overall, the research supported Richard Tiplady's description of the situation for mission organisations:

*"Structures should flow from vision for mission, and yet too often structures and institutions are directing themselves towards preserving what we already have"*.

# 1. The Research

The key questions that the research addressed were

- 1. What are the key characteristics of UK Christian mission organisations and their Boards?**
- 2. Do Boards of UK Christian mission organisations feel that they have the capabilities to govern in the current rapidly changing context?**
- 3. How do the Boards of UK Christian mission organisations feel that others, particularly Global Connections, could help enhance their capabilities?**

An on-line consultation survey was sent to the Chief Executives of all GC members except churches, requesting a Board member to respond if possible. Of the 159 organisations invited, 44 responded (28%). Follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with 25% of responding organisations, selected to be representative of overall responses. The survey responses have been retained by GC for future use/comparison.

# 2. A World of Change?

Paul Hildreth's research for Global Connections identified nine significant contextual changes for UK to world mission:

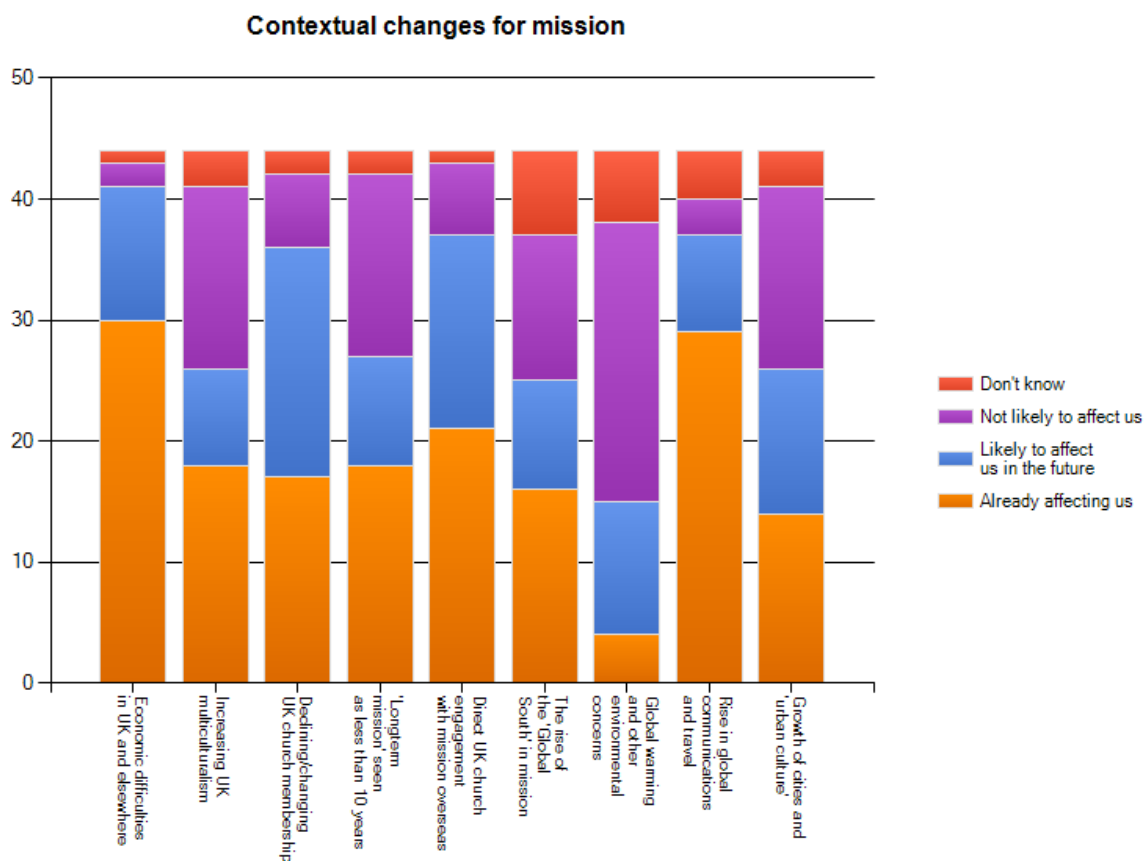
- Economic difficulties in UK and elsewhere
- Increasing UK multiculturalism
- Declining and/or changing church membership
- 'Longterm' mission now seen as <10 years rather than 'for life'
- Direct UK church engagement with mission overseas
- The rise of the 'Global South' in mission
- Global warming and other environmental concerns
- The rise in global communications and travel
- The growth of cities and 'urban culture'.

His key conclusions were:

- **There are clear signs that current mission models will become difficult to sustain in the future**
- **Mission organisations need to plan ahead and shape new solutions**
- **The mission community needs to shape a revised paradigm of mission.**

His findings are supported by the research of many other development and Christian academics and practitioners. They are fundamental matters of vision, strategy and direction and, as such, they are matters that must be addressed by governance bodies.

This research project asked which of these context changes were affecting CMOs, with the results as shown in the diagram below. Overall, older/larger organisations were more likely to be already experiencing or expecting to experience the impact of the context changes. Many expected that their organisation and/or Board would need to change, in particular the makeup of their Board and/or their organisational culture, consider new models and seek spiritual guidance.



In the UK voluntary sector press, there is currently much discussion about the difficulty of being a competent charity board member in a context in which charity law and regulation are becoming increasingly complex, and in which the UK operating environment is changing significantly. The complexity of context and the changes in operating environment are even greater for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), including CMOs. They also have to consider global changes

such as global financial turmoil, the security implications of the 'Arab Spring', international political upheavals and anti-Western militancy. They have to consider their governance, strategy and plans in the light of culture and change in those countries, in their international federations and in UK law and good practice. Altogether, a wide-ranging and complex challenge for a group of volunteers!

These findings lead to the following questions for Boards of GC members:

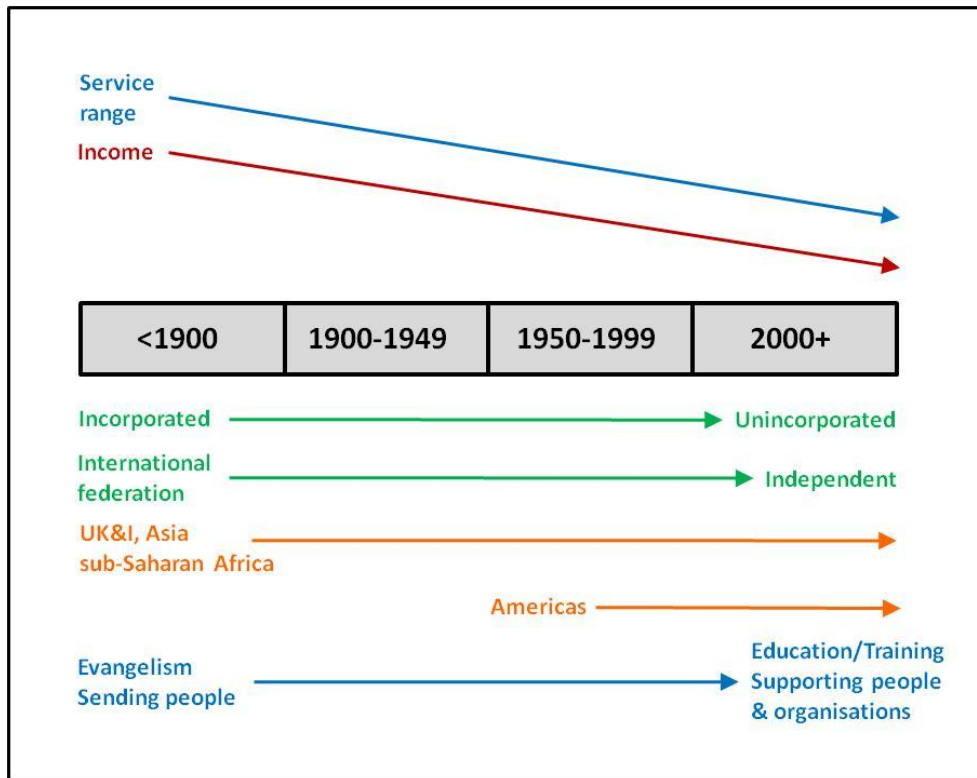
**Which of the context changes are affecting or will affect us?**

**How, if at all, do we need to actively respond and when?**

### **3. Overview of Findings**

#### **3.1 UK Mission Organisations and their Boards**

The trends in characteristics of UK mission organisations are shown in the diagram below, compared to date of establishment. One notable characteristic is that many organisations provide a wide range of services in a wide range of places. As one interviewee said "*Charities are great at taking new things on but lousy at dropping things*". There is potential for concern about over-stretch, lack of focus and/or mission drift for some organisations.

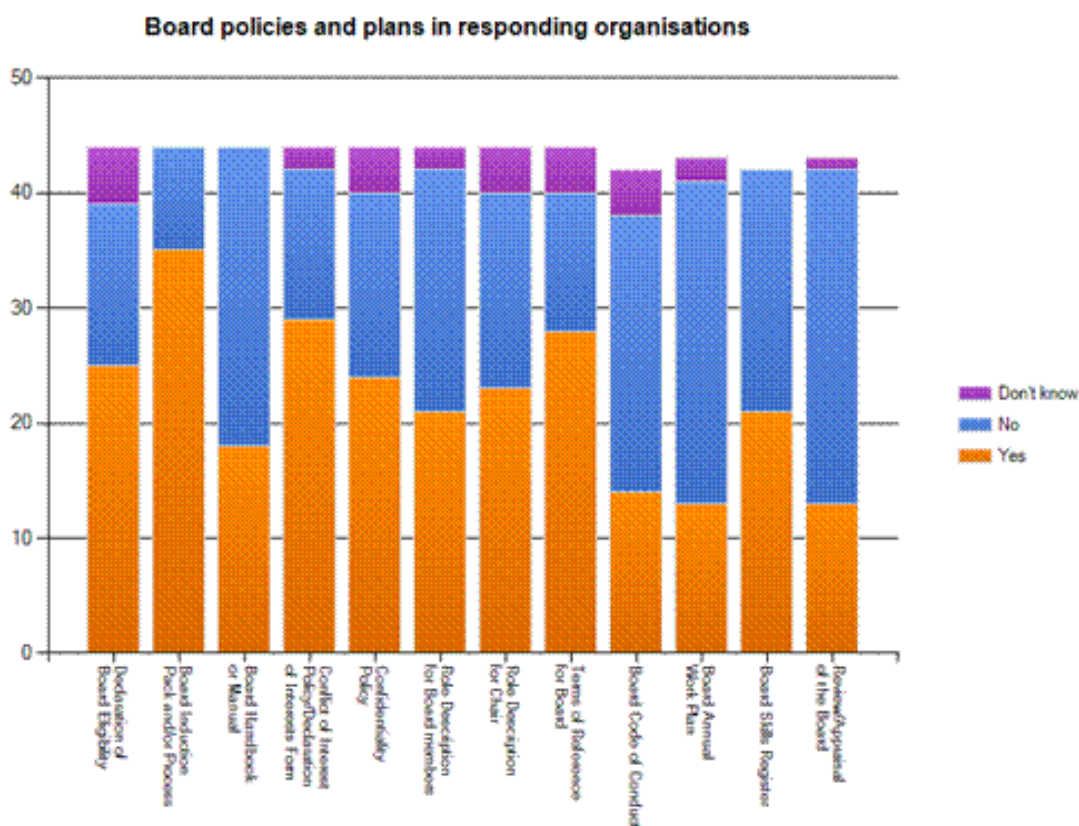


In summary, the research showed that CMO Boards have the following characteristics:

- Composition**
  - Average members is 8
  - Average women is 2
  - Average 'non-white British' is 1
  - Most members are aged 45-74 and have been members for 9 years or less
- Recruitment**
  - By far the most common Board recruitment method is 'Contacts of staff and/or Board members'
- Meetings**
  - Average number is 5 per year, lasting on average 5 hours
- Policies & Plans**
  - Average of 6/12 in place
- Expertise**
  - Average of 8/11 on Board
  - Least common were Property, Marketing, Legal and Recruitment/HR in that order
  - Fundraising also valued

The lack of diversity is more marked than in UK charities generally and may lead to Boards having limited perspectives. Similarly the rather 'closed' nature of Board recruitment may lead to restricted insights, in particular in relation to strategic and visionary thinking.

UK non-profit good practice identifies twelve policies and plans for Board operation. The existence of these for mission organisations is shown in the diagram below.



The results for Board Review are lowest (30%) against 66% for charities generally, which indicates that mission Boards may not reflect on their own performance. The overall average of 6 policies/plans in place seems to be rather low when compared with recommended good practice and is an area in which GC may be able to provide support or enable cross-fertilisation between member organisations.

Similarly, UK good practice identifies eleven areas of appropriate Board expertise:

- Theology/missiology
- Work in other cultures
- Financial/accountancy
- Business acumen
- Charity governance
- Legal acumen
- Marketing (inc. Fundraising)
- Property/estate management
- Personnel/HR
- Strategic planning
- Visionary/future thinking.

The research indicated a lack of Marketing expertise which is notable in the current difficult charity fundraising climate and with use of multi-media becoming the 'norm'.

The need for Marketing/Fundraising expertise was confirmed in interviews. Marketing-led strategies are being adopted by many charities to better match the needs of beneficiaries with those of supporters. UK CMOs may need to consider targeted recruitment of new Board members with Marketing and/or Fundraising expertise.

Overall, the findings in relation to mission organisations and their Boards lead to several questions for the Boards of GC members:

**Are we doing the right things and in the right places?**

**Do we have the right people on the Board, with the right skills?**

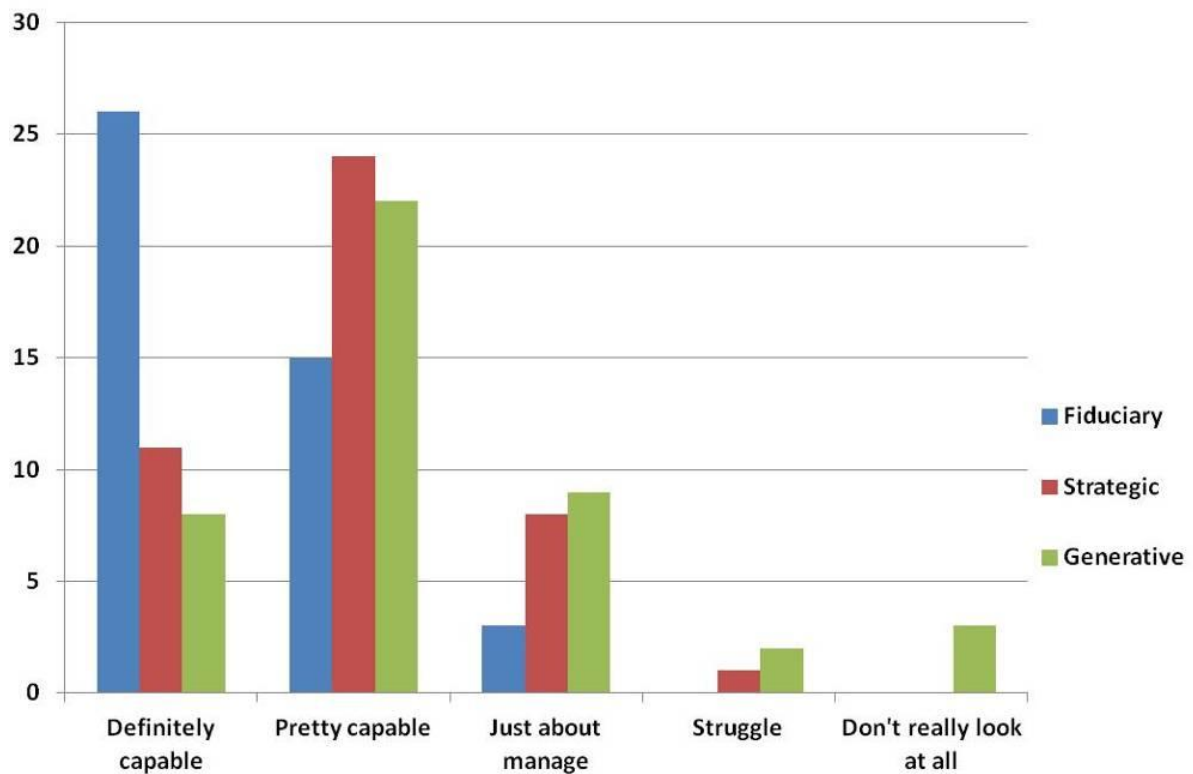
**Do we operate the Board appropriately for our organisation?**

### **3.2 Board Capabilities**

Richard Chait is a key US researcher and writer in the area of equipping boards. His work with Ryan & Taylor, called *Governance as Leadership*, identifies three key modes of governance

- Fiduciary – legal responsibilities of oversight, stewardship and compliance
- Strategic – setting the course to deliver the mission and objectives
- Generative – framing problems, options, new insights and ideas.

In general, the research showed that mission Boards felt a good level of self-confidence in all three capabilities, as shown in the chart below. [Note: The research could not check the accuracy of the self-assessment]



It is notable that Boards feel more confident in fiduciary than strategic responsibility, and less confident again in generative responsibility, given that

*“Good trusteeship is about much more than just adhering to the mandatory compliance and oversight responsibilities. A good board will provide strategic leadership for the organisation and help the charity to increase its impact.”*

(New Philanthropy Capital, Board Matters)

Several Boards were concerned that “we don’t know what we don’t know”, and a significant number relied on single sources of information (generally CEO/staff) so may have a limited perspective. Of concern were 6 Boards self-assessed as ‘Definitely capable’ or ‘Pretty capable’ for all responsibilities but which rely almost entirely on single sources of information, 4 Boards that largely rely on staff for all responsibilities, and a further 4 Boards that largely rely on ‘Finding out’ for all responsibilities.

It is also of some concern that, in over 40% of organisations, staff develop the Strategic Plan and Boards approve. Other research shows that “... strategic contributions of the board are identified as one of the most salient features associated with organizational performance” and that, in relation to strategic planning, “Professional staff and board members each bring complementary skill sets and perspectives to the table. One without the other would result in a skewed and incomplete picture”. Taken together,



these findings suggest that UK CMOs may not be adopting the most effective approaches to developing Strategic Plans.

In general, Boards felt more capable where

- The Board had a larger average number of members (10)
- Board members had generally served less than 10 years
- More diverse methods were used for Board recruitment
- More Board policies and plans were in place
- Board members had a greater range of expertise
- There was a Strategic Plan in place, developed jointly by Board and staff
- The Board considered 'new thinking'.

So, again these findings lead to questions for the Boards of GC members:

- **Are we fulfilling our fiduciary, strategic and generative responsibilities?**
- **What, if anything, do we want to do to improve our capabilities and ways of working?**

### ***3.3 Support from Global Connections***

The research asked about ways in which others, particularly Global Connections, could help to enhance the capabilities of Boards. Suggestions included:

- Provide easily digestible resources on issues and trends, blending spiritual with current thinking
- Provide access/sign-posting to experts/professionals, including facilitators for Board/staff strategic planning days
- Provide Trustee recruitment/redeployment/induction services
- Facilitate opportunities for inter-organisation cooperation
- Provide training and occasional conferences/consultations on strategy and change, including how to develop strategy and how to be strategic about promotions, marketing and fundraising
- Continue providing excellent conferences
- Keep looking ahead and advising on new thinking, and advise on its application
- Engage more with Boards (though they are VERY busy people!).

These suggestions have will be provided to Global Connections for consideration.

## 4. Conclusions

The consultation survey confirmed Hildreth's findings that UK mission organisations are operating in a rapidly changing and complex context, and showed that higher impact is generally being observed and/or expected by older/larger organisations. This underlines the need for urgent consideration of strategy and vision by Boards.

The research has established a new information set, not previously available to GC. The findings indicate potential for concern about over-stretch, lack of focus and/or mission drift for some organisations and the lack of diversity in Boards. Also, that there is potential for improvement in Board effectiveness by widening the recruitment 'pool', adopting additional good governance practice, recruiting Board marketing/fundraising expertise and undertaking reflective learning.

The study has established that there is a generally a good level of self-confidence in Boards of UK CMOs, but there is evidence that a number of Boards 'don't know what they don't know'. Significantly, there is a clear positive correlation between self-confidence and largish Boards with higher turnover, greater skills, diverse recruitment, more policies/plans, a Strategic Plan and 'new thinking'. There is potential for improvement in Board capability through use of additional information sources, particularly external ones, and greater involvement in strategic planning.

A recent UK survey of non-profit organisations established that 57% expect to need to invest in developing Board leadership in the coming year, with 70% citing strategic thinking as a priority. UK CMOs will need to consider whether they wish to address Board development and, if so, whether it is an individual or common task. GC will need to consider its own role, if any, in member Board development.

To conclude, a quote from Wilbert Shenk, a leading American historian of mission:

*"Structures cannot lead the way. They must be devised in response to a vision ... we will not find the way forward by concentrating on salvaging or reviving old structures. Indeed, we ought to be prepared to evaluate them honestly and take necessary decisions to terminate those that no longer serve a valid purpose. We should turn our energies to discerning what the shape of mission is to be in the changed world situation and find the wineskins that can hold the new wine of God's Spirit."*

## Some useful books and online resources

- Baker Tilly with ACEVO *Baker Tilly Leadership Survey 2011* [Online - Baker Tilly]
- Bruce, I. *Charity Marketing – Meeting Need Through Customer Focus* London: ICSA Publishing
- Chait, R.P., Ryan, W.P. and Taylor, B.E. *Governance as Leadership - Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* New Jersey: John Wiley
- Charity Commission *The Hallmarks of an Effective Charity* [Online – Charity Commission]
- Dalton, D. *Good governance: a practical guide for trustees, chairs and CEOs* London: NCVO
- Evangelical Alliance *Faith and Nation: Report of a Commission of Inquiry to the UK Evangelical Alliance* [Online – Evangelical Alliance]
- Hildreth, P. *UK to Global Mission (Seminars given at Global Connections Conference, November 2011)* [Online – Global Connections]
- Hudson, M. *Managing without Profit* London: Directory of Social Change
- Moynagh, M. *Changing World, Changing Church* London: Monarch
- PwC *Managing charities in the new normal – a perfect storm* [Online - PwC]
- Sargeant, A. and Jay, E. *Fundraising Management – Analysis, Planning and Practice* Abingdon: Routledge
- Sharken Simon, J. *Five Life Stages of Nonprofit Organisations* Saint Paul MN: Fieldstone Alliance
- Tiplady, R. *World of Difference - Global mission at the pic'n'mix counter* Paternoster Press
- Vernon, B. and Stringer, E. *Board Matters: A review of charity trusteeship in the UK* [Online – New Philanthropy Capital]

**Denise Pavey**

denise.pavey@gmail.com

07769-176971

**November 2012**