

Mission Drift

Perspective Discussion Guide

Leadership Series | LUV Library of Perspective

The purpose of this conversation is not to reach immediate agreement or develop an action plan. It is an invitation to explore the Perspective itself.

Understanding → Mutual Dignity → Ownership → Lasting Results

How to Use This Guide

For the person holding the conversation

This is a reflective dialogue, not a training, presentation, or implementation session. Choose the section that best fits the group. You do not need to ask every question.

- Invite discovery rather than persuasion.
- Allow disagreement, uncertainty, and silence.
- Ask for meaning before asking for solutions.

Do not rush toward consensus, a revised mission statement, or an action plan.

- Select the questions that best fit the people, time available, and direction of the conversation.
- Return to the central question as the conversation deepens. Its meaning may change as different roles and experiences are heard.
- The conversation has been worthwhile when people leave seeing the organization, their role, and the experience of those served more clearly.

The LUV Learning Process
Experience → Reflection → Discovery → Ownership

Choose Your Conversation

Conversation	Designed For
Leadership	Executives, directors, board members, and senior leaders
Managers and Supervisors	Those translating organizational direction into everyday work
Frontline Professionals	Professionals working directly with people, families, and communities
Whole Organization	Leadership, management, administration, facilities, support roles, and frontline teams together
Community Perspective	People, families, youth, community members, partners, funders, contract holders, and others affected by the work

1. Before the Discussion

Welcome to this reflection on Mission Drift.

The purpose of this conversation is not to decide whether the organization has remained faithful to its mission, identify who is responsible for drift, or immediately determine what should change.

It is an invitation to explore what becomes difficult to see when the work grows crowded: what the mission and purpose mean now, where people recognize themselves within them, how separate roles connect, and what the combined work feels like to the people the organization exists to serve.

LUV conversations invite discovery rather than persuasion. Participants are not expected to arrive at the same conclusion. Different roles may see different parts of the organization, and those differences are part of what the conversation is designed to reveal.

Mission drift does not always mean that people stopped caring or that the mission disappeared. The mission may still be present while funding requirements, initiatives, policies, programs, and everyday responsibilities make its purpose harder to see.

A mission is not collectively owned simply because everyone has read it.

People must be able to recognize where they fit within it, how their work serves its purpose, and how their contribution connects with the work of others.

As you enter the discussion, resist the urge to move immediately toward solutions. First allow the organization to see what may have become disconnected, assumed, or invisible.

2. Shared Discussion Questions

Use with any audience before moving into the perspective-specific conversation

First Response

What stood out to you most in this Perspective?

What part felt immediately true or familiar?

Was there anything you resisted, questioned, or disagreed with?

What idea are you still thinking about?

What did the Perspective cause you to notice that you may not have noticed before?

Mission and Purpose

What is the difference, if any, between an organization's mission and the purpose behind it?

How would you explain why this organization exists without reciting its mission statement?

Where is the mission most visible in the organization's everyday work?

Where has it become harder to see?

Can an organization remain busy, effective, and compliant while becoming less connected to its purpose?

What is the difference between adapting the work and allowing new demands to redefine why the organization does it?

Seeing Where We Fit

Where do you see your own role within the mission and the purpose behind it?

How does your work make it possible for someone else to carry theirs?

Whose work makes your contribution possible?

Which roles are most readily associated with the mission? Which roles may be overlooked?

What happens when someone understands their responsibilities but cannot see how those responsibilities contribute to the larger purpose?

Can good work remain disconnected work? What might that look or feel like?

Can people genuinely own their part of the mission if they cannot see where they fit or how their work serves the larger purpose?

Change, Decisions, and What We May Not See

When a new initiative, policy, funding requirement, or everyday practice is introduced, how do people learn why it matters—not merely what has changed?

Who is assumed to be affected by a decision? Who may be assumed to be unaffected?

What knowledge might be held by the people responsible for carrying out a change?

How do seemingly small decisions shape the combined experience created by the organization?

How does the organization discover effects that were not visible from the position where a decision was made?

When circumstances change, do we reconnect the work to the mission—or assume people will make that connection for themselves?

Before assuming a decision affects only one role, have we created a way to discover what we may not see?

The Experience of the People Served

Do people receiving services experience our funding streams, departments, and initiatives—or the combined effect of all of them?

Where might the organization see separate responsibilities while a person or family experiences one confusing journey?

What does connected work feel like to the person being served?

What might circular referrals, repeated explanations, conflicting expectations, or unclear responsibility reveal about the visibility of mission and purpose?

Whose perspective would allow us to see the combined experience more clearly?

Tension and Complexity

Can funding influence what an organization does without being allowed to redefine why it does it?

What happens when mission, mandates, funding, workforce realities, and community needs pull in different directions?

Who carries the responsibility for keeping purpose visible when not everyone has equal authority?

Can people own their contribution to a decision they did not make? What understanding would make that more possible?

When is consistency necessary, and when might it hide effects that differ across roles or people?

How can an organization invite perspective without suggesting that every decision will be shared or negotiable?

A. Leadership Perspective

For executives, directors, board members, and senior organizational leaders.

Purpose

To explore how leaders hold mission, purpose, authority, stewardship, and competing demands—and how their decisions shape whether people throughout the organization can recognize the part they carry.

Discussion Questions

How do leaders know whether the mission is actively guiding decisions rather than simply affirming them afterward?

What pressures make it hardest for leadership to keep purpose visible?

When a funding opportunity or initiative aligns with part of the mission, how do leaders consider what it may quietly redirect, crowd out, or fragment?

How might positional authority limit what leaders are able to hear about the effects of a decision?

Who can see consequences that leadership may not be positioned to see?

How are people invited to explain what a proposed change may affect before assumptions harden?

What responsibility do leaders carry for helping people understand not only what is changing, but where their contribution fits?

How do board decisions, executive decisions, and operational decisions remain connected to the same purpose?

What roles may leadership unintentionally treat as supporting the mission rather than carrying it?

How can leaders retain responsibility for decisions while accepting responsibility for understanding what those decisions may affect?

What would indicate that staff are carrying requirements but no longer collectively carrying the mission?

Question to Sit With

Inviting perspective does not mean surrendering responsibility for the decision. It means accepting responsibility for understanding what the decision may affect.

B. Managers and Supervisors Perspective

For those responsible for supervision, coordination, implementation, and translating organizational direction into everyday work.

Purpose

To explore how managers make organizational purpose visible within daily responsibilities and connect decisions, teams, and roles that may otherwise experience the work separately.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to translate an initiative or policy without reducing it to tasks and deadlines?

How do managers help people recognize why a change matters and where their role fits within it?

What happens when managers are expected to create clarity around decisions they do not fully understand themselves?

Where do managers see connections or contradictions that may be invisible above or below them?

How can supervisors invite staff knowledge without promising that every recommendation will determine the decision?

When staff raise an unexpected consequence, is it treated as resistance, information, or both?

How do pressures from leadership affect the space managers create for honest feedback?

How do teams learn how their work affects other departments, roles, and the person being served?

Which staff contributions are easiest to connect to the mission? Which require more intentional recognition?

How might supervision help someone move from knowing a job description to owning a contribution?

What gets lost when implementation is considered complete because everyone received the instructions?

Question to Sit With

When managers communicate what must be done, do people also have enough understanding to recognize what they are being asked to carry—and why?

C. Frontline Professionals Perspective

For professionals working directly with individuals, youth, families, and communities.

Purpose

To explore how frontline professionals connect organizational mission and purpose with the realities people experience—and what they can see that may remain invisible elsewhere in the organization.

Discussion Questions

Where do you experience the organization's mission most clearly in your direct work?

Where do policies, initiatives, or requirements make the purpose behind the work harder to see?

How do you understand the contribution your role makes beyond completing assigned responsibilities?

How does your work depend on administrative, fiscal, facilities, leadership, and other roles that people receiving services may never see?

What effects of organizational decisions become visible only when they reach the person or family being served?

What happens when you identify an unintended consequence? Where can that knowledge go?

When might a staff member appear resistant because they are protecting something important about the mission or the person being served?

How do separate programs, requirements, and referrals combine into one experience for the person in front of you?

Where are frontline professionals expected to repair disconnection they did not create?

What do people, families, and communities reveal about whether the organization's work makes sense together?

What would help you see your own place—and the place of other roles—more clearly within the larger purpose?

Question to Sit With

What can the people closest to the experience see that the rest of the organization needs a way to discover?

D. Whole Organization Perspective

For conversations that include leadership, management, administration, facilities, custodial, support roles, and frontline professionals.

Purpose

To explore how every role carries part of the mission, how those contributions depend upon one another, and whether the organization experiences them as connected work.

Discussion Questions

Can people across the organization describe the purpose behind the mission in language they genuinely recognize?

Where does each role see itself within that purpose?

Who depends on your work in order to carry out theirs? Whose work do you depend upon?

What does your role allow you to see that another position may not see?

Which contributions are publicly associated with the mission? Which may be present but largely invisible?

Where might one department believe a responsibility ends while another experiences its effects beginning?

How might a decision that appears relevant to only one role alter the work or experience of others?

How does understanding move upward, downward, and across the organization?

Where does information stop? What assumptions fill the space when it does?

Do people understand only the initiative they are carrying, or how it connects with other work surrounding the same person or community?

What does the combined effect of our separate roles feel like to the people the organization exists to serve?

Can the organization collectively own a mission that people experience only in separate pieces?

Question to Sit With

If every role carries part of the mission, do the people carrying those different parts understand how they belong together?

A Reflection Across Roles

Invite participants to reflect from their own position. This is not a performance assessment or a request for immediate solutions.

Where does my role contribute to the organization's purpose?

What do I carry that others rely upon?

What do others carry that makes my contribution possible?

How might a decision within my role affect someone else's ability to serve the mission?

What may be difficult for others to see from where I sit?

What may be difficult for me to see from where they sit?

What does the combined effect of our work feel like to the person being served?

If people are expected to carry every new policy, initiative, and requirement, but are not invited to see where they fit, what exactly are they being asked to own?

E. Community Perspective

For conversations with—or in preparation for engaging—people, families, youth, community members, partners, funders, contract holders, and others affected by the organization's work.

Purpose

To explore whether the mission and purpose are recognizable from outside the organization, and to honor the knowledge held by people who experience the combined effects of its separate decisions.

Discussion Questions

How would people and communities describe what this organization exists to do?

Would they recognize themselves and their hopes within the organization's stated mission?

Where might the organization experience coordinated programs while people experience separate doors, repeated stories, or circular referrals?

What do people affected by the work understand that no organizational chart, performance measure, or report can fully reveal?

How might funders, contract holders, and partners strengthen—or obscure—the organization's connection to purpose?

When community input is invited, what allows people to believe the organization is prepared to discover something it does not already know?

What risks might people experience when describing the effects of decisions made by organizations that control services, resources, funding, or opportunities?

How can an organization be honest about nonnegotiable requirements while remaining curious about their effects?

What happens when the organization's definition of success and the community's experience of success do not align?

How might community perspective reconnect separate roles and initiatives to the people they collectively serve?

What would allow people outside the organization to experience its mission as something lived rather than stated?

Question to Sit With

If the people the organization exists to serve cannot recognize its purpose in their experience, where does the mission live?

4. After the Discussion

Do not rush to translate the conversation into an action plan, rewrite the mission statement, or assign responsibility. Allow participants to leave with questions, tensions, and emerging insight.

What idea are you still sitting with?

Did anything shift in how you understand mission drift?

Where did you recognize your own role more clearly?

What did you hear from another role that you had not considered before?

What connection became more visible?

What may still be disconnected or assumed?

Where did you notice yourself becoming defensive, curious, or surprised?

What question do you want to carry forward?

Whose perspective would deepen this conversation?

What would you like to understand more fully before deciding what this Perspective means for your work?

Participants may reflect silently, write privately, or share with the group. No one is required to leave with the same conclusion.

5. Guidance for the Person Holding the Conversation

Your role is not to teach the correct interpretation, determine whether mission drift has occurred, or guide participants toward a predetermined answer.

- Invite rather than persuade.
- Protect dignity across roles and levels of authority.
- Allow disagreement.
- Resist correcting people too quickly.
- Ask for meaning before asking for solutions.
- Make room for silence.
- Notice whose role or perspective is missing.
- Avoid treating feedback as a promise that every decision will change.
- Remain curious about unintended effects.
- Let discovery belong to the participants.

When the Conversation Moves Too Quickly Toward Action

What do we need to understand more fully before deciding what to do?

What belief or assumption is underneath that proposed solution?

Are we trying to resolve the tension before we have understood it?

Whose work or experience might this affect in ways we cannot yet see?

What perspective have we not heard?

How does this connect to the mission and the purpose behind it?

The conversation has been worthwhile when people leave seeing more of the whole—not merely when they leave with a list of tasks.

6. Continue the Conversation

Mission and purpose remain visible when people can recognize where they fit, how their work serves, and how their contribution connects with the work of others.

This discussion is not intended to complete the work. It is an invitation to begin seeing the relationships among mission, decisions, roles, and lived experience more clearly.

Consider continuing the conversation through another audience perspective, a related LUV Library title, or a deeper organizational dialogue.

Continue the Conversation with LUV

Every organization carries its own mission, history, pressures, relationships, responsibilities, and possibilities. If this Perspective raised questions about whether purpose remains visible and collectively owned within your organization, LUV invites you to [schedule a complimentary conversation](#).

Together, we can explore leadership conversations, team reflection, guided dialogue, and the LUV OIS – Organizational Implementation System.

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