

Tokyo 2010 Research Issue

The Valuing of Missiological Research

Introduction

This is an edited and semi-organized compilation of responses to the proposition and question noted below. I have not added any of my own comments, and have not taken extra time to refine the categories. Thus, much commentary could be added to each point, and further organization could be offered.

This product is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the subject. Rather, it is a starting place for discussions to be carried on into the future.

Proposition - Missiological research is a critical component of the task of engaging and discipling the remaining unreached people groups.

Question - Is missiological research valued as it should be among mission leaders? Why or why not?

General Factors

1. Value varies enormously from totally valued to completely not valued.
2. The variance is among mission leaders, among organizations, and even within organizations.
3. Valuing relates to the cost of obtaining the information, not just on the perceived value of the information.
4. Valuing relates to the type of research done (qualitative vs. quantitative, etc.)

Factors Affecting How Mission Leaders Value Research

1. Do they understand it? If they “get it” they will value it. But if the data is not understood, or not relevant to the decisions a leader is making, the resources used to undertake the project are wasted. This reinforces the idea in a leader’s mind that research is not of practical benefit.
2. Are enough people doing research that can be applied? When missiological research is not highly valued, it can be because the findings are not readily applied to a field context, or else the reports are not sufficiently practical. On the other hand, when research clearly outlines new models that can be reproduced and multiplied, and offers compelling information and data, mission leaders are able and willing to embrace the information and make changes.
3. What information do they view as appropriate to use in guiding their strategy development?
4. What effect has their formal or informal training had on them?
 - a. Have they been exposed to missiological research?
 - b. Have they been encouraged to use research?
5. What is their organizational decision-making tradition? This determines the protocol for valuing of research.
 - a. Are decisions a purely spiritual practice in which “God’s will” is discerned through spiritual disciplines?
 - b. Are decisions a strategic component of completing a known objective, with the spiritual component assumed?
 - c. Are decisions made by a hybrid of these two approaches?
6. Are mission leaders open to changing their strategies based on research? Research may only be valued among mission leaders when it supports their presuppositions. When it might require them to change or adapt based on the reality that the research presents, they often times refute or trivialize it.
7. Are the mission leaders visionaries and strategists who are looking to accelerate the completion of the Great Commission? Or are they simply looking to hang on in their organization as long as they can?
8. Will mission leaders only “own” research that comes from their organization or constituents?

Other Issues with Mission Leaders and Research

1. They are not proactive in getting research done, even if they do appreciate it.
2. Decision makers so often don’t pay attention to the research results that are already available and usable. They seem to make decisions based on other factors.
3. Even if mission leaders value research, there is a gap at the grassroots practitioner level. Most mission leaders are aware that the greatest effectiveness can only come when we know the current status of progress (where work is and isn’t, and how “healthy” it is). In contrast, most grassroots practitioners are rightfully more focused on what their calling and task is rather than the larger task, meaning the research is not as relevant to them. Those with “big picture” responsibility recognize the value of the research far more readily.
4. In many cases, mission leaders seem to still be using data numbers that are outdated.
5. Mission leaders can base their assumptions on what happens in their church or mission, and assume that this must

be what other groups are doing as well.

6. Research could have been performed, but the results reported in a format inaccessible to the leaders.

7. Mission researchers and mission leaders are not communicating well. We are expecting mission leaders to take up the research based on a passive relationship. Intentional partnerships will yield better results. Without communication of available vs. desirable research, the researcher doesn't always gather what the mission leader wants or needs and the mission leader doesn't always know or desire what the researcher offers.

Other Issues Related to Researchers

1. Have researchers demonstrated how existing demographic research can be applied before undertaking customized projects?

2. Some of the research done is very poor and does not really correspond with field realities.