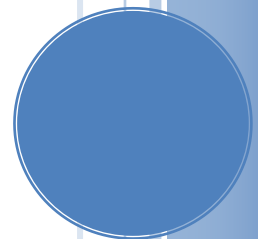


POSITION PAPER ON OC RESEARCH

Purpose for OC Research

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PURPOSE FOR OC RESEARCH

It is essential that both practicing field researchers and their teams fully comprehend not only the purpose statement for OC research, but also the manner in which it is interwoven and foundational for team ministry on the fields.

It should be recognized that OC research has both internal and external dimensions. Further, there are subdivisions within these two categories. These are the elements peculiar to OC which differentiate it from the research practices of other missions and organizations.

Recently the World Evangelical Fellowship asked for the registration of research centers engaged in evangelical endeavor in an effort to bring about coordination and resource conservation in accomplishing the tasks. Loh Hoe Peng, in attempting to develop a catalogue of such centers, discovered that it was necessary to further define the research activity according to its scope and purpose within each activity reporting. In my discussions with him, I suggested that perhaps four categories apply. The first is those who are accumulating factual data only. This includes demographic information regarding both the context and the institutional church. Such information is published or maintained for access and use by others as they desire. The extensive tome produced by David Barrett falls in this category. Depending on the continuity of the endeavor, this information will provide either a single snapshot in time as Barrett did, or through the accumulation of subsequent data makes available information for further analysis.

The second category is made up of those who do such analysis to show trends and to define potential places of ministry which are in need of pioneering effort.

The third category consists of those who not only do trend analysis, but seek to discover to a limited degree some of the factors which cause these trends. These organizations publish papers along with their statistical data and analysis to assist whomever is interested in such information.

A fourth category in which OC finds itself is organizations which do all of the above but carry the analysis of the factors to greater depth with the primary purpose being to understand both the institutional church and its context with regard to both its past and present ministry effectiveness and its potential for meeting identified needs in the future. The primary output of such research, as far as OC is concerned, is a basis for decision for its own ministries in serving the church and for carrying out the other three categories of its basic strategy, motivation, training, and mobilization.

The first internal function of OC research, then, is to form a basis for decision by the field director and his team, to guide the collective and individual ministries in such a manner as to produce maximum benefit for the church and the evangelization of the nation. To fulfill this purpose, it must seek to provide understanding both of the institutional church in all of its manifestations and of the context in which that church exists. It must reveal how the national church sees itself regarding its purpose and its felt needs. It must reveal what the church considers to be the objectives for its ministry and how it evaluates its own effectiveness. In short, it must seek to come to the core of developing a relationship which ultimately will result in a partnership with the church in achieving its needs. The understanding of the culture within which the church exists is vital to coming to full comprehension.

In the achievement of this effort in partnership with the church, evaluation of the products from the ministry of the church and the adequacy of its methods becomes a key ingredient. Further, the definition of ministry potential, both cultural and cross-cultural and in terms of need and opportunity is essential in making decision regarding how OC pursues its ministry in behalf of the church.

The second internal function of OC research is to evaluate the achievement of OC ministry goals and objectives which are established according to the knowledge and understanding gained from exploratory research. The primary aim of such effort is to evaluate not on a success/fail basis the progress, but rather to evaluate the effectiveness of the effort and to identify facts and factors which either are enhancing or impeding achievement of the goals.

The external function of the research effort is to assist the church. The primary purpose is to demonstrate the value of research to the church and to encourage ownership and the development of capability within its own institution. In short, the desire is not to do research for the church but to do research with the church. The development of national researchers is a primary goal. Obviously, the sharing of research information is a function of the external purpose and must be given its rightful place but should never supersede the primary desire of producing indigenous research effort.

Key elements in the field research process can be defined as follows:

1. Through the ministry of research to build relationships and credibility with the church. Research should be regarded always as a ministry. The gathering of

- information in itself should be pursued as a ministry of encouragement and helps.
2. The discovery and definition of church goals as the church sees them. This is vital to avoid the concept that we have come to tell the church how to do its ministry and to establish the goals for them. We indeed may perform such a function, but it must be in partnership with the church and at an appropriate pace if we are to gain acceptance and achieve the mobilization we desire.
 3. Through working with the church, discovering the growth and nongrowth information which can be analyzed to discover the reasons for growth and nongrowth. It is from such information and its analysis that motivation, training and mobilization can be both devised and accepted by the church in its efforts to evangelize its own nation.
 4. Identify and define models of ministry which are producing or not producing balanced church growth and evangelization. Such models usually exist in the context. They may not be the only models but serve as a basis for the development of other models if this seems to be necessary. The discovery of such models and their definition in noninstitutional terms forms the basis for challenging other parts of the church to their use. Further, it serves as a base for unifying the church in commitment to growth goals without institutional alignment.
 5. A continuing evaluation of church ministries and opportunities is essential to provide feedback and further challenge as well as refinements that will make better use of available resources. Maximum efforts should be made to accomplish this in cooperation with the church.
 6. A cataloguing of opportunities for ministry service by the church, both cultural and cross-cultural, needs to be maintained in order to help the church in setting its priorities among the many opportunities which are always available. Further, such catalogue serves to keep a continual challenge before the church for the evangelization effort.
 7. Records of church growth and the analysis of that growth to determine factors contributing to it must be maintained current and with ongoing effort. Again, this should be accomplished with the church to the maximum extent.
 8. The achievement of items one through seven lay the basis for the analysis that will provide a definition of ministry objectives for OC. If maximum benefit to

the church is to be achieved by OC, the above information is essential. Further, if it has been carried out to the extent noted with the church, the church will be more open and receptive both to acknowledge the validity of such objectives and to receive OC into partnership in their achievement.

9. Once team objectives have been established as well as individual ministry objectives, the researcher assumes the supportive task to the field director of obtaining data which will help track the efforts of the team in ministry. Using the evaluation criteria developed by the team in forming the objectives and information provided by team members regarding the results of their ministry, he is able to provide status reports as well as analyzing factors which are contributing either to effectiveness or noneffectiveness. By providing this information to the field director, the team is able to make adjustments and or refinements to further enhance its effectiveness in its ministry.
10. Finally the researcher performs the review and analysis function with the team by taking the results of item nine and putting them into the required format which provides both the basis of future planning decision for the team and for the area director and headquarters in their overview functions.

This general overview demonstrates the perceived needs for research in OC ministry. In summary, it is the basis for performing in a knowledgeable fashion and with maximum responsiveness to the leading of the Holy Spirit the task of serving the church to enhance discipling of the nation.

DISTINCTIVES OF OC RESEARCH

A short listing of OC research serves to distinguish it in its primary role as one of the four points of OC basic strategy.

1. It is directed to church growth and cross-cultural missions.
2. It is field oriented.
3. It is primarily for the use of OC.
4. It is performed jointly with the church.
5. It is calculated to avoid duplication by being aware of and using to the maximum the efforts of others.
6. It seeks to intensify contextualization of the gospel and church practice, to lower barriers to salvation and enhance multiplication of the church.
7. It has three major phases: equipping the church for research effort, serving to guide OC ministry endeavor, and evaluation of the ministry of the OC field team.

OC as a mission is committed to harvest theology. In short, this means that OC chooses to work where there is either demonstrated reaping of the harvest or a definitive potential can be identified. Further, there must be a church capable of reaping the harvest. This has an impact on our distinctives for research. Our two primary elements, contextual and institutional research, are performed in keeping with this focus. Contextual research allows us to define the potential for harvest. Institutional research permits us to evaluate the readiness of the harvesters. The consensus of both elements provide the basis for both need and opportunity for OC to assist the church in its equipping ministry for the harvesters, to send them forth into the harvest field.

RESEARCH PLAN

Research, to be effective, must be based on providing the desired information. The general plan for OC research has been defined above. The desired output is basically categorized as information for decision making by the OC team and information which will serve to identify effective ministry models and opportunities as well as growth and achievements in ministry by the national church.

A completed research plan defines the necessary categories of information which are required to be developed. This is a delimiting criterion which keeps the information base reasonable and manageable.

Methods of analysis must also be defined which will meet the requirements of the output desired.

Verification criteria must also be established which will assure the adequacy of the information which has been obtained. Failure to accomplish this can result in misuse and waste of both human and monetary resource too great to contemplate.

A research plan will also define the necessary resources for its accomplishment. This will include both human resource as well as monetary resource. It is obvious that this is an essential part of both the recruiting and budgeting processes.

A research plan is also a basis for getting church participation. It provides knowledgeable communication to the church both in encouraging its participation in the research process as well as gaining acceptance in interviews and meetings for the purpose of gathering information.

Finally and not least, the research plan is essential in gaining acceptance by the field team itself and its necessary participation in the research process. The task of field research is primarily that of the field researcher, but his task cannot be accomplished without the cooperation and participation by other members of the team.

The flow of OC research could be described as field contextual research to identify the potential for harvest followed by institutional research which would identify the potential to reap that harvest and the needs for further preparation which in turn identifies opportunities for OC to practice its basic strategy of motivation, training, and mobilizing, and finally leading to the establishment of OC goals by the field team. The essential aspects of the research plan cannot be overstated.

INFORMATION BASE

The undergirding of all of the research effort rests in the information and data base. It is the foundational structure for the research plan. It is a basis for informed decision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who will give the divine wisdom which will complete the search for His purpose and will in our ministry.

OC has been working for several years toward the definition of a core base of information which will be common to headquarters and all fields. A base was established several years ago, but it has been recognized for some time that this base is neither adequate nor is it focused primarily on the ministry goals of OC as a mission. We have been seeking to refine this base for some time. We have focused on this achievement as a primary effort and have brought together field researchers for a conference to deal with this issue. This is the first such endeavor OC has made. It is intended that from this conference will come the development of an interfield network that will serve to share techniques and knowledge that will enhance effectiveness of OC research and catalyze much greater achievement in our fields.

In missiological research the development of analytical methods which capitalize upon the information base for the development of effective ministry is still in its infancy. Recognizing the field as being very complex, nevertheless there is much to be gained from greater understanding which can be obtained through the application of anthropological research efforts which will help to identify the cultural barriers which prevent the church from reaching its field potential. Our task is to help the church make the message clear and to seek to remove all cultural impediments so that those who hear are able to make a knowledgeable decision concerning the claims of Christ and regarding their salvation. We need to concentrate our data base on those facts and the factors which have created or are creating those facts regarding the church in reaping the harvest. Further, we need to develop the analysis which will lead to the identification of the factors in an orderly and effective manner. This is our current endeavor. Completion of this endeavor will enable us to prepare a basic handbook for field research personnel and to give greater assistance to our teams as they seek to participate with the church in equipping the harvesters to disciple their nation.

PURPOSE OF OC FIELD RESEARCH

1. General Purpose

- Research Is A Normal Function. Everyone uses information. Organized research is needed to improve on the normal information gathering process. OC wants to be effective in using information to the best advantage.
- To Inform. Research is accomplished not for its own sake, but with the specific intent of providing a basis for knowledge of the church and its culture. Roger E. Hedlund in *India Church Growth Quarterly* has said it well, "Missiological research is not to accumulate interesting information but to correctly inform the people of God so as to bring vital information to bear on the task of world evangelization."
- To Provide Better Understanding. Research prepares the heart and mind with information which makes them more sensitive to the mind of God. Research is not the answer to the problem, rather the means to better understand the problem and the answer.

2. Corporate Purpose

- Research is a basic element of the OC four-part corporate strategy. Field research is an active expression in the resident context of that strategy which provides grounds for the other three parts, motivating, training, and mobilizing. It answers the questions that these other parts must address in order to be most effective.

3. Internal Functional Purpose

- To Provide Ways to Understand the Context of Ministry. Research provides a framework for interpreting the context of the culture in which the OC team's efforts must take place. Without this framework any ministry effort may be irrelevant to the people for whom it is intended.
- To Form Knowledgeable Ministry Goals and Objectives. Field research is conducted systematically and intentionally to determine critical needs for ministry. This provides a knowledgeable basis for establishing team ministry goals and objectives.
- To Stimulate More Effective Team Ministry. Knowledge obtained from field research is to be used to guide the process of concentrating the efforts of individual team members into a unified field ministry to carry out the

corporate purpose of the mission. It also provides a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of that ministry.

Proper use of research will help each OC field team determine which needs are most critical to church multiplication, both culturally and cross-culturally. It can then deploy the current resources to best help meet these needs.

Research also furnishes the rationale for further recruitment of international and national missionary personnel and resources for those critical needs that the team is not currently equipped to handle.

4. External Purposes – “Assist the Church”

- To See Potential. Research examines the context and the existing church institutional efforts to see what potential exists for the church to disciple its nation. It is this potential that provides vision and encouragement to the church. It will enable the church to see that the task of discipling their nation is a reality that can be accomplishing and not merely a philosophical wish.
- To See Needs. When the potential is determined, it should become apparent that certain needs will have to be met in order for that potential to be achieved. Research efforts shared with the church will help to determine its needs for ministry and the areas where OC can be of help.
- To Meet Selected Needs. OC has neither the resources nor the inclination to meet all the ministry needs of the church. To do so not only would rob the church of the opportunity, blessing and obligation to see the Lord work through its own members, but would deny it the self sufficiency it must have to achieve its mandates. The role of OC is catalytic in motivating, training and mobilizing the church through selected ministry chosen to be most effective.
- To Identify Change Agents. Research discovers the national change agents with whom OC can work to maintain effective change in areas selected by the OC team for ministry.

Research discovers ways to motivate and help the change agents to make necessary changes that will lead to growth of the church and to discipling the nation.

- To Identify Models. By examining the church institutions and their effect on the culture, one can find the most effective models where change is happening, or find the models that are not producing change, both of which can serve to motivate the church either to progressive or corrective action as appropriate.
- To Discover the Right Timing. Mobilization is primarily a matter of timing if the proper motivation and training are taking place. Research discovers the timing best suited to full and effective mobilization.

5. Conclusion

Research is a tool. The objective in research is not focused on the tool itself, but rather on the effect which the tool makes in producing the desired objectives of evangelization and church multiplication. The tool is merely a means to that end. Thus, research fulfills its intended purpose when it is used to help the team and the church toward a more effective ministry.