Hermeneutics & Communication

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There is a need for a new training paradigm that serves missionaries and entrepreneurs joining the mission field to serve the Kingdom. Today’s Modern Day Missionary should receive Business As Mission (BAM) training before entering the mission field. Likewise, BAMers (BAM Practitioners) should receive missional training. It is believed this can greatly increase the probability of successful missional assignments, fewer failed businesses, and reaching more people for Christ.

Historically, missionaries were sent overseas to share the gospel. The language was an obstacle that was overcome with the diligent work necessary to communicate. Like language, Culture was also important, allowing missionaries to build relationships that established trust. Both would eventually lead to sharing the gospel. These were significant milestones that helped the missional movement grow. With so much perceived need in the developing world, missionaries saw the opportunity to provide for basic human needs like water, food, and clothes.

Missionaries and “Faith-Based Development Organizations (FBDOs) have increasingly been recognized as an important component of international development” (Morse & McNamara, 2023, p2) and to share the gospel. There were also business people known to start fake or cover businesses (i.e., a business in name only), also went overseas to gain access to Restricted Access Nations & Closed Access Nations (RANs/CANs). All had good intentions, but failed businesses and projects (e.g., water wells) resulted in locals' distrust of foreigners.

Business and Missions have existed for generations but have operated independently with varying results. Neither churches nor Missionaries could foresee that failed businesses and broken projects (e.g., water well) would lead to the refusal of US assistance in the future. Moïse Valère EBENDENG ONDO found that when American Missionaries returned home, the local pastors had problems carrying on because they lacked training (2021). Similarly, fake or cover businesses owned by Christians experienced lower success rates. As a result, Albright (2014) found participants in his study were hoping to stay “as far away from donor dependency as possible” (p. 225).

Despite these challenges, the desire to help developing nations alleviate poverty and serve the Kingdom continued. Business minded Christians wanting to change the stigma associated with failed projects and fake businesses established BAM to access RANs/CANs to reach UPGs (Unreached People Groups) with the gospel. They went overseas starting legitimate businesses to create jobs and provide public services & goods. Today BAM is an emerging field within the Christian community as a means to alleviate poverty.

The BAMer, like the Missionary, lives by biblical principles and was trained to do a job. Typically Missionaries are trained to go overseas and are placed in jobs; whereas BAMers, who are trained for business, go overseas to start companies that create jobs. Both juggle their job as they learn to fit in with their chosen community. Both have been successful at sharing the gospel and both have experienced challenges they needed to adapt to.

A review of literature revealed areas where additional training would be beneficial. Examples include, but are not limited to: documentation of missionary experiences (Arnold, (2023), collaboration and managerial skills in work programs (Wulandari, 2023), leadership skills like the Apostle Paul (Stenschke, 2023), and effective business systems (Wickman, 2011). Incorporating these components (and others) could significantly increase the success rate of both missionary assignments and the BAM ventures.

Since BAM shares the same biblical principles as Christian Missionaries, it (BAM) is more compatible than traditional business, especially regarding outcomes and desired achievement goals. The Author envisions BAM partnering with missionaries and mission organizations to develop a synergy between BAMers and Missionaries to improve the overall results (e.g., more missionaries completing their assignments, more jobs, and more long term missionaries).

To accomplish this the Author proposes developing a new Training Paradigm that accounts for the evolution of mission work and replacing cover/fake businesses with BAM. It also expands upon Johnson’s (2022) recommendation that BAM businesses have both a business CEO ; and a ministry CEO.

The new Training Paradigm will equip BAMers for missions and Missionaries for BAM. The goal is to improve outcomes for those involved in both missions and international development work by bringing the two communities together essentially training the Modern Day Missionary. The following outlines several elements of the Training Paradigm for the proposed Modern Day Missionary:

First, individuals should participate in short term mission trips prior to committing to mission work. The experience of traveling and working overseas will help individuals. Chong, Benjamin Kok Siew Gan, & Menkhoff (2022) documented how students gained more from a short term mission trip that provided internship experience. Students valued field trips, interviews, and shadowing actual business people more than task oriented work with no exposure to the business or the owners. Today’s world is smaller because we have global access via the internet or travel. Those that want to travel can go anywhere in the world. Similarly, those that prefer to stay within the US can volunteer to help a cause or organization.

Second, individuals will complete a spiritual gifts assessment to understand how God has gifted them. This part of training will help individuals understand where they best fit within a church and missional organization. BAMers need to think about how they can use their gifts because they are trained for business, not for missions. In-depth training will help BAMers understand how to use their gifts overseas. BAMers will also be equipped to start an Employee Resource Group (ERG) or a community outreach program. Likewise, Missionaries will be taught to think about how to use their gifts on the mission field (e.g., in their job assignment or within their new community).

Lastly, the Author, who is a Career Coach believes that every Missionary and BAMer should complete a personality assessment. Results will help individuals learn about their godly design and whether they should work overseas, run a business, or be in ministry. BAMers and mission sending agencies will value this knowledge because it will narrow down the applicant pool, and identify what jobs people are best matched to.

Missionaries will receive Intro to BAM training as part of the foundation to work overseas. Just like BAMers, it is important for one’s work to match their godly design. Training will cover assessment results, working overseas, developing a long term strategic plan, and equipping them to see opportunities for ministry and business.

According to Johnson (2022) “without the “B”... -there will be no “M” (p151), which also works inversely… every “B” needs the “M”. This requires more work, but Johnson suggests BAM businesses have a dual executive team, one business CEO and one mission CEO. Johnson interconnects Business and Mission so the two operate together equally yoked. The new Training Program Paradigm will better prepare both the BAMer for the mission field; and the Missionary to work and witness through a company (e.g., ERG) or community program.

It is important to briefly note that the church, like mission sending agencies, has a role in Missions and BAM. The Author’s church supports missionaries and hosts different short term mission trips. The church doesn't, however, recruit or train BAMers. In fact, the church has a policy that congregants are not to promote or solicit business from other members. This church and others like it should be introduced to BAM to find more Modern Day Missionaries. The potential for equipping new Modern Day Missionaries is unlimited, especially with the proposed new Training Paradigm.

There is also a need for more research in BAM, missions, churches, and training. In addition, studying this new Training Paradigm to assess the success in helping the Modern Day Missionary achieve better results. Doing so will enable BAM practitioners and Missionaries to become leaders who eradicate poverty, improving the lives of those less fortunate.

The Author is hopeful that this new Training Paradigm will positively impact both the Missionary and the BAMr. It is expected that this training will increase the number of successful mission assignments as a result of having a more specific assignment for work and spiritually. Using the assessments as part of the training program will identify candidates with the greatest potential to be career missionaries. BAM practitioners trained to be mission minded will operate more successful businesses because they will spiritually support staff and the community. This new Training Paradigm will equip the Modern Day Missionary to reach more people for Christ.

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