

Globalisation and International Mission Agencies

(Peter Nicoll, Operation Mobilisation)

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Introduction

The full reality of Globalisation first dawned on me when in 1995 we were stopped by a policeman in Helsinki, Finland, in an American van, with foreign registration plates. The driver was Armenian with an Uruguayan drivers licence. The van was licensed in Belgium, insured in Holland, brought into the country on a ship registered in Malta. The ship is owned by a British charity, managed by a German company but staffed by over two hundred people from thirty five nationalities, by an International Missions movement. The reason we were in Helsinki was because we were ministering together with the local churches in Helsinki under the auspices of a Finnish registered organisation.

For years we have been talking about the “Global Village”. The real question is, “Now that we live in it, how do we minister in it and to it?” Leaders in business, information technology, higher education, et al, have been and are taking the globalisation phenomenon very seriously. What about the International Missions agency? The primary implication of globalisation for an International Missions agency is that mission is no longer us sending missionaries to some other needy people, but missions is now from everywhere to everywhere. This must influence our thinking of organisational culture, our international structures and our modus operandi.

How should International Mission agencies respond to Globalisation ?

The growth of the church around the world, in contrast to globalisation, is an expression of eternal principles set in motion by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is not a product of recent secular historical movements and trends. The church was meant to become global even if the world remained forever provincial. In the creed we state that we believe in “..the Holy catholic church and the communion of the Saints.” It is important that we develop a global ecclesiology as a backdrop for missions.

Araujo (Interdev) suggests that the question of how the church should face globalisation is misplaced. From a biblical perspective, it is globalisation that has to face the church. We must judge the "pattern of this world" and decide under the counsel of the Holy Spirit what is good and what is not good about it. The key principle for Christians looking at globalisation, then, is to refuse to be lured, intimidated, or pressured by it.¹ At the same time we cannot ignore the very real opportunities and strengths of globalisation for missions. For the International Missions agency our missiology must consider the implications of globalisation alongside contextualisation.

In October 1999, when the one hundred and sixty mission practitioners, missiologists, and church leaders from fifty three countries met for the Iguassu Consultation to consider the missiological issues facing missions in the twenty first century, they included as one of their commitments, a commitment to ‘Globalised Missiology’:

¹ Alex Araujo, *Globalization and World Evangelisation*. In William Taylor ed. *Global Missiology for the 21st Century, The Iguassu Dialogue*. Baker Academic. 2000 p60-62

The insights of every part of the church are needed, and challenges encountered in every land must be addressed. Only thus can our missiology develop the richness and texture reflected in the Scriptures and needed for full obedience to our risen Lord. We commit ourselves to give voice to all segments of the global church in developing and implementing our missiology.²

I believe the real challenge of globalisation facing missions agencies is more in the implementing than in the developing of a biblical missiology of globalisation. Rose Dowsett makes the point: “. . .it means in turn that the model of the missionary society, which served well as a dominant model for two centuries, will probably need radical (and painful) adaptation to meet the needs of a new context. That model grew out of the West, and in structure and organisation, as well as economically, may not be readily transferable elsewhere.³

Definitions of Globalisation.

One of the difficulties is to define this phenomenon of Globalisation in terms of how it effects international mission. One can be sure that virtually every one of the 2822 academic papers on globalisation written in 1998 included its own definition, as would each of the 589 new books on the subject published in that year. For missions, globalisation at its most fundamental is about increasing global **interconnectedness** and an increasing sense of **the global whole**.⁴ It is about missions being from everywhere to everywhere.

There are two very important characteristics of globalisation that must be considered by International Mission agencies. David Lundy, in his definition of globalisation highlights the fact that globalisation is more than a trend, he suggests it is a mindset that is influencing and changing the worldview and the context in which we minister. This means it is more than reorganising the way we do mission, it involves rethinking some deeply held values and cultural norms we might have.

Globalisation is the cultivation of a mindset and the practical expression of it, whereby a group or an individual moves away from parochialism to universalism. In missions, this means that true partnership and synergy emerge between the diverse sides of the worldwide church in the task of world evangelisation.⁵

Dave Hicks, in the standard definition accepted by OM in 1994, refers to globalisation in mission organisations as a process we must enter into.

Globalisation is the process by which organisations move beyond merely operating internationally, from a single or dominant national base to operating trans-nationally, not tied to one particular country or region. Globalisation in missions involves not only carrying out ministry across cultures, but also accomplishing the resourcing, governing, planning and organising of missions by involving the church in diverse regions⁶.

² William Taylor ed. *Global Missiology for the 21st Century, The Iguassu Dialogue*. Baker Academic. 2000 - pages 20,

³ Rosemary Dowsett, *The Great Commission*, Monarch. 2001. page 207)

⁴ Robertson, 1992 quoted in *Global Connections* June 2002. Pg3

⁵ David Lundy, *We are the World, Globalisation and the changing face of missions*, OM Publishing, Carlisle.UK. 1999

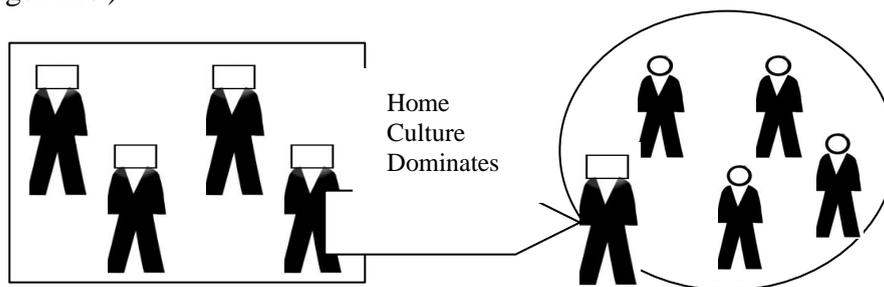
⁶ OM's Book of Standard Definitions. (OM Books. Carlisle 1994) p13.

If we are going to be relevant to the present context in which we serve and from where we resource our mission, we have to at least, give serious attention to these two characteristics of globalisation. To the first by giving attention theologically to globalisation and mission, and to the second, taking seriously the process of change whereby all the stakeholders in mission can be involved in the resourcing, governing, planning, organising and implementing of mission.

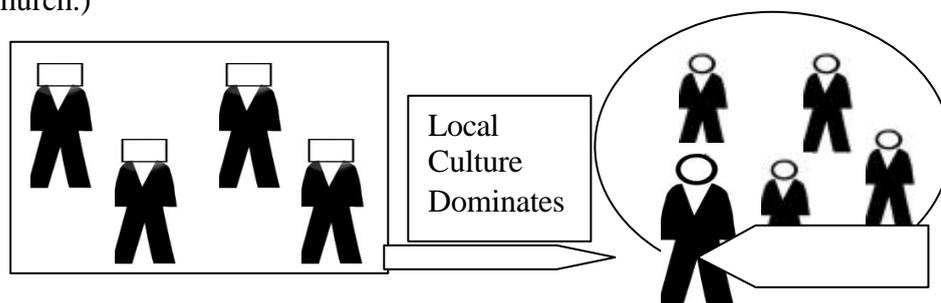
Models for International Missions Agencies.

The primary areas in which we have to rethink our missions structure are, as Hicks suggests the areas of resourcing, governing, planning and organising of missions. Three models⁷ from the corporate world may help us grasp some of the issues that must be faced by International Missions organisations. (*Arrows represent influence, control, power etc.*)

1. The Ethnocentric Organisation – Complex organisation in a home country with centralised decision making in the HQ there. Evaluation and control is based on home standards, and communication flows outward to subsidiaries in host countries with ownership and recruitment of crucial management largely coming from the home country. (This is very much like the early western mission agencies.)

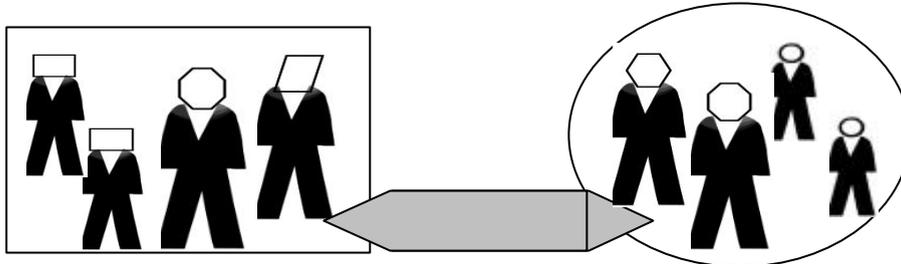


2. Polycentric Organisation (Multinational Structure) – Less authority and decision making from the HQ, with evaluation done locally. Ownership, key management, and recruitment are from the host nation. (This is very much like the model used today in places where the missionary serves under the leadership of the national church.)



⁷ Notes from David Barnes, Notes for *MBA International Enterprise – Operations*. Open University Business School. Illustrations my own.

3. Geocentric Organisation (Global Structure) – is an increasingly complex, interdependent organisation which seeks collaboration between and among HQ and subsidiaries. It uses standards for evaluation and control which at times are universal and at times local. Ownership, key management, and recruitment are global.



In this third model all involved are influenced by each other.

In the models above, what is important to note is who has the influence and authority in the organisation? Who makes the decisions regarding ownership, key management, and recruitment?

- Is it the traditional sending or resourcing country? (Ethnocentric model.)
- Is it the hosts? (Polycentric model.) or
- Is it all stakeholders influencing and learning from each other? (Geocentric model)

Considerations for International Missions Agencies.

Lundy makes the statement that “a mission cannot call itself globalised until its two-thirds world missionaries feel at home in their own organisation.”⁸ I would add, “..and that the one-third world missionaries still feel at home in it.”

There will always be different organisational cultures at different levels of the organisation. In the field, the host culture and the implications of contextualisation must influence the way missions is conducted. This means the national leadership will feel far more at home, but must nevertheless be open to the contribution and influence of other cultures in the team and of the organisation internationally.

At a regional and certainly at an international level the organisational culture may be different again, where some cultures may feel more at home than others. Again key issues such as the decision making process, the appointment of international leadership, the formulation of international policy and practice etc. must be understood and endorsed by all the stakeholders.

In OM we have discovered that this has changed the way we conduct our business. For many two-thirds world people the informal, relational processes are far more important than the formal, structural processes. This has led to items for business being introduced and then followed by limited discussion. Plenty of informal time for discussion is given and then in a later business session a final decision is made, usually through consensus and not by a majority vote.

⁸ Lundy p45

Globalised organisations will take the values of two-third world stakeholders seriously, when they insist that partnership is more than agreed financial and strategic arrangements, it must be fleshed out through rich interpersonal relationships. “Relationship precedes function, friendship precedes efficiency ...”⁹

One of the criticisms of globalisation is that it is driven predominantly by western influences and values. In commerce it is the non-western world that makes the major adjustments.(As in the ethnocentric model.) In international missions it should be that all parties are open to the influence of the others and all are willing to make adjustments for the sake of the gospel. (Geocentric model.)

Multi-cultural Teams

One of the realities of the globalisation of mission is multicultural teams. This is true not only on the field but even in the Mission agency’s National office. (OM’s National office in the UK comprises of some twelve different nationalities.) Serving in multinational teams adds a whole new challenge to missions. This challenge is more than simply dealing with the cross cultural realities of people in the team, but dealing with the relationships to a number of resourcing and sending fields, different expectations from different home churches, the effect of multiply currency fluctuations on support levels, even greater diversity in church backgrounds and theological perspectives. (Even in India where the workers may by mostly Indian they come from very different cultural and language backgrounds.)

What are the different expectations of families regarding education or responsibility towards the extended families back home? These and many other issues enter the arena of team life and leadership in the field.

Organisations and mission teams will have to learn how to establish and agree on a team and organisational culture. The ability to negotiate this is a necessary skill of modern mission leadership.

Conclusion

This paper has touched the surface of some of the issues. The key is that we must be willing to learn from each other and we must be willing to form interdependent partnerships where each stakeholder has a voice and a measure of ownership in who we are and how we operate. This will take time. This will be painful. Often we will question if the process is worth it, but it must be done. This will reflect far more significantly the glory of God.

And the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

Habbakuk 2:14

⁹ Samuel Escobar, “*The internationalisation of Missions and Leadership Style*” Speech to the 1991 Evangelical Foreign Mission Association Annual Convention.