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Measuring and Assessing Kingdom Impact
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Introduction

As researchers, you and I are asked to measure, assess, and evaluate various ministries to determine effectiveness, efficiency, and ministry outcomes. We are asked to discover where God is working and discern how the Spirit is moving through or across people groups, countries or ministries. I want to tell a quick story.

Over twenty years ago, I was on furlough working in Global Research putting data together for the first Status of Global Christianity Map. You may remember that. One Friday afternoon, I was feeling sorry for myself and asked the Lord "What am I doing here?" I literally worked in a closet painted dark gray without a window. So, the Lord posed the question back to me "Steve, what are you doing here?" My response was, "Lord, you know what I'm doing. I'm banging on a computer all day." This conversation occurred two more times and the Lord said to me "The data you are entering is tracing My fingerprints around the world." My perspective was radically changed from entering global statistics and people group information to tracing the Hand of God across His globe.

In 2nd Corinthians 2, Paul thanks God for leading Christ's triumphal procession which spreads the aroma of Christ to the saved and perishing. He proclaims, "Who is equal to such a task?" I agree with Paul!

The Leadership Network published Eric Swanson's *Nine Game-Changers for Global Missions* based on interviews with fifty missional leaders who identified changes and projected trends in 21st century missions. In his conclusions, Swanson states "Evaluate each of your ministry locations as to how you are combining words of love and works of love. Good deeds verify the good news while good news clarifies good deeds."[1] Evaluation and assessment is part of the modern trend in missions.

Jerry Muller, author of *The Tyranny of Metrics,* writes "We live in the age of measured accountability, of reward for measured performance, and belief in the virtues of publicizing those metrics through 'transparency'… but this is deceptive. Accountability ought to mean being held responsible for one's actions."[2] Muller continues that we live in an age of measurement, mismeasurement, and over measurement which tend to become misleading measurement and counterproductive measurement. Is the problem that we face one of a fixation on measurement and assessment?

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[1] Swanson, Eric. 2010 *Nine Game-Changers for Global Missions: Trends that Shape the Future*. Leadership Network. www.leadnet.org
[2] Muller, Jerry Z. 2018. *The Tyranny of Metrics.* Princeton, NJ. Princeton Press.

To delve into the details of biblical and theological assessment and evaluation is beyond the scope of this paper. There are many indicators of assessment and measurement in the Scriptures. This presentation will present an overview of measurement and assessment from a biblical perspective, investigate several research models, and suggest a five-step process to be used in conducting research. The material for this paper is gleaned from various authors, methodologies, and personal experience. Although Scripture is infallible, I am not, so I would welcome your feedback and insights on this topic.

Biblical background
Is there a scriptural basis for assessing, evaluating and measuring Kingdom Impact?

Old Testament – Obedience-based assessment and evaluation
Most likely, the Ten Commandments are the clearest illustration of assessment and evaluation in the Old Testament. Through the commandments found in Deuteronomy 4:12-14 and Exodus 20, clear moral and ethical standards were established for the Jews. In the giving of the Law, civil and legal ramifications were set forth which would guide the nation of Israel for generations. These commandments and the resulting punishments were clear indications that evaluation and assessment were normative in the lives of the Jewish people. Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God were called to obedience and faithfulness to the Law. Rabbis constructed the Talmud, or the oral law, as a fence around the Torah.

An illustration of measurement and assessment in the Old Testament is found in 1 Samuel 15:13-15. Samuel the Prophet and King Saul have a discussion about absolute obedience to the Word of the Lord. King Saul was commanded to defeat and totally annihilate the Amalekites, their livestock, and not spare a single person. However, Saul disobeyed God and saved King Agag and the best of the sheep, cattle, lambs and everything that was good. When Samuel arrives the next day and catches Saul in disobedience, Saul blames the soldiers who saved the livestock for a sacrifice. Samuel confronts Saul with the Word of the Lord and His rejection of Saul as King. This is observational research and assessment.

Another example related to assessment and measurement comes from Numbers 1-2 where Moses is instructed to take a census of Israelite men over twenty years of age by tribe, clan, and family. The purpose of the census was to organize the camp and assign responsibility for specific tasks. Counting and measuring is an aspect of the character of God and helped organize Israel.

God's concern for assessment and identifying specific details is shown in Exodus 25-26 where God instructs Moses in the exact specifications of the Ark of the Covenant, Table, Lampstand and each of the furnishings of the tabernacle and temple. Additionally, in 1 Kings 6-7, the blueprints and foundation of the temple was laid to exacting dimensions with each of the decorative elements described for construction.

One passage mentioned by those who do not believe measurement and assessment is biblical is found in 2nd Chronicles 21:1-6. The story goes that King David was incited by Satan to conduct a census of the fighting men of Israel. Joab was opposed to the census, but David conducted it anyway. As previously mentioned, conducting a census was acceptable for Moses but David's motivation was different, and he had not been instructed to count Israel as had Moses. To take this one text and apply it to mean that counting, assessing, measuring and evaluation are opposed to God's will, I believe, does injustice to the broader message of Scripture.

In the Old Testament, when the people of Israel followed Jehovah God and obeyed his laws and statutes, God blessed them. When the Jews were disobedient and did not follow God but chased after the gods of the Philistines, Hittites, Perizzites, Ammonites and the rest, God punished them. Therefore, in evaluating and assessing the Jews in the Old Testament, we find an obedience-based model based on Israel's obedience and God's blessing, or disobedience and judgment.

New Testament

Jesus also used measurement and assessment in His ministry. There are multiple times He spoke of numbers as a measuring tool. We must also recognize that Jesus spoke of things that could be measured and those which could not. An example is the feeding of the 5,000 found in Matthew 14:13-21. The scriptures were deliberate in recording how many men ate and the resources available – five loaves and two fishes. The analysis of this feeding indicated that 12 baskets were left over. Mission accomplished with limited resources and there was a balance leftover.

Jesus uses the metaphor of the Spirit as wind in John 3 when He talks with Nicodemus about the work of God. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going" John 3:8. We can see the results of God's work but may not be able to measure it without specific research.

Scripture uses the image of a mustard seed to indicate enormous potential in a small seed. This metaphor indicates that all things cannot be assessed by the size of the initial action. Mark 4:30 -32 speaks of the Kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed – smallest seed results in a large plant over 20 feet tall. In this sense, the timing of when the measurement or assessment is taken is crucial to understanding the magnitude of the effect.

Luke 15:4 Jesus speaks to the preciousness of the sheep by going after the one lost sheep. The shepherd left the ninety-nine and sought out the one lost sheep. Jesus knows who His are and, I believe, we should also.

After the resurrection, John 21 records when the discouraged disciples returned to fishing. After a long night of catching nothing, Jesus asks a question and gives a recommendation. Their raised nets caught a multitude of fish – 153 as listed in John 21:11. Jesus is concerned about numbers.

There are more examples in the New Testament about God's concern for both individuals and groups. In Acts 2, Scripture records that Peter and about 120 disciples were gathered in the

Upper Room. The Holy Spirit fell and Peter preached, resulting in 3,000 baptism. Additionally, a continual response came from those in Jerusalem – "and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." 2 Peter 3:9 shows the Father's patient heart that He is not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Therefore, it is clear from the Old and New Testaments that God is concerned about measuring and assessing His Kingdom. He desires all from every tribe, language, people and nation to come to saving faith in Christ. He records the names of those who trust in Him into the Lamb's Book of Life.

So, what assessment models are there for researchers like us to measure and assess Kingdom impact in our spheres of influence? What can we do to discover what God is doing and begin to describe it both quantitatively and qualitatively? How can we verify and confirm the work of God among his people and beyond?

Assessment Models
What methods or models are used for assessments?

Quantitative research usually involves identifying characteristics of observed phenomena or exploring the relationship between two or more variables. This model measures a situation as it is and is not used to determine cause-and-effect relationships. There are four major designs in quantitative research: observational, correlational, developmental and survey research. Survey research is the most prevalent design in quantitative research. Correlational studies examine to what extent differences in variables are related to one or more characteristics. If a correlation exists, one variable increases and another variable either increases or decreases in a predictable fashion. For example, when worship attendance increases does Bible study attendance also increase?

Surveys using rating scales are the most common form of descriptive, quantitative research. Surveys gather information about groups of people by asking questions about their opinions, thoughts, or attitudes, and tabulating their responses. Surveys are "point in time" data. Most organizations conduct surveys using checklists and rating scales like the Likert scale to capture a continuum of behavior, attitude or emotion. Constructing good surveys is both an art and science and many of the surveys out in the mission community do not reflect the necessary scientific rigor to adequately reflect the desired outcomes.

Strengths - A *quantitative* approach is more effective at gaining numeric or survey results. Quantitative methodology uses structured surveys to frame questions which can be answered using Likert Scales, ranking, priorities, and satisfaction. These questionnaires provide a structured way to sample a population. Sampling is extremely important in quantitative research so results can be generalized to the larger population. Numerous sampling methods are used to identify segments of a given population.

Weaknesses – Quantitative research is limited as it is not designed to get behind the survey question to the respondent's motivation for their answer. a respondent answered. Sampling errors are more prevalent with sample sizes, randomization, or response rates not meeting accepted standards. Since survey questions are closed ended questions with a limited number of choices, it is possible to exclude viable options for response. The concern over those who did not respond can skew the data and miss large segments of the sample population.

Qualitative research focuses studying complex phenomena occurring in the real world. An assumption in qualitative research is based on the researcher's ability to interpret and make sense of what is seen as critical for understanding critical social phenomena. This model might reveal the nature of these multiple factors through personal interaction. A qualitative study can help define what is important when little information exists on a topic.

There are five major designs for qualitative research: Case Study, Ethnography, Phenomenological, Content Analysis, and Grounded Theory study. Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne E. Ormrod provide an excellent text on practical research. [3]

A qualitative approach is valuable when it can reveal the nature of certain situations, settings, or relationships. This design allows researchers to gain new insights about the phenomena, discover possible problems within a phenomenon or develop a new theory about the experience. Another strength of this model is verification and evaluation of assumptions, claims or practices. This study provides the opportunity to judge the effectiveness of practices, strategies, or innovations.

Strengths – Many mission researchers use qualitative study because large sample sizes are not required, and after interviewing between 15-20 individuals, data saturation is usually reached. Data saturation occurs when there is a significant repetition of responses to research questions. Qualitative research requires a respondent's matrix and a discussion guide. This ensures respondents represent the audience and are asked the same questions for consistency of data.

At the beginning, qualitative research can be conducted in a relatively short period of time through designing and testing of a discussion guide to structure the interviews or conversations. These conversations are best digitally recorded and transcribed to capture the actual words, pauses, and inflections of those interviewed. These conversations yield a tremendous amount of information beyond the scope of the project. Respondents reveal thoughts, concepts, and ideas beyond the expectation of the researcher. With this information, the researcher can adjust the discussion guide to probe further with other participants based on what is learned in previous interviews.

Weakness – Selecting a representative group of respondents can be a challenge as the sample needs to be broad enough to get a cross section of the population studied. Care needs to be

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[3] Leedy, Paul D. and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. 2005. *Practical Research: Planning and Design 12th Edition.* Columbus, OH; Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall Press.

taken so the researcher interviews a broad spectrum of respondents. Another challenge is the back-end work required to translate and transcribe the interviews. This usually takes four times the time scheduled for interviews in order to compile these interviews into a format which can be used for analysis. Although this is time consuming, during translation and transcription much of the best information is discovered.

Mixed Methods - Hybrid approach

Mixed method research attempts to balance the strengths and weaknesses of both models. A mixed methods model combines the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research to identify new questions and obtain a deeper perspective on specific issues. This quantitative - qualitative model is used to surface issues through a survey or questionnaire and then once the critical issues are discovered, qualitative methodology seeks to obtain deeper understandings of identified issues. It is also possible to employ qualitative methods first to discover issues and follow that up with a survey to rank or prioritize the ones to address through further ministries or action.

Anecdotal Model

This is the most often used model in Christian research. Typically, it uses a convenience sample of individuals who are easily accessible or have a relationship with the researcher. My friend, Marty, told me a story about his friend Joe who has seen many people come to Christ. In this model, second or third hand reports are received and counted as valid, objective research. One challenge is circular reporting! Although hearing the inspiring stories is great, but the anecdotal model is not considered as valid, objective research.

Five Step Assessment Process

Define Objectives – It is imperative that the research project have clear, specific, and identifiable objectives. This begins with clearly crafted research questions which have specific outcomes. For example, an objective to measure the growth of the church in Eurasia is a challenge as the scope is too large to measure. If the objective were to measure the growth of the church in Turkey from 2000-2015, it would be more realistic and could be accomplished. Good, precise research questions guide the researcher to focus on the specifics and not get lost in the forest of interesting information. Ask the “W” questions – Who, where, what, and why to capture the research objective. The research objectives usually determine the methodology used in the project.

Select Methodology – Decide which of the above three models (quantitative, qualitative or mixed method) will you use to answer your research questions. Research questions help define the methodology used in the project. If detailed numeric information is required, it would be unwise to use a qualitative approach.

A *quantitative* approach is more effective at gaining numeric or survey results. *Qualitative* research requires a respondents’ matrix and a discussion guide. This ensures respondents represent the audience and are each asked the same questions for consistency of data.

Quantitative methodology uses structured surveys to frame questions which can be answered using Likert Scales, ranking, priorities, and satisfaction. These questionnaires provide a structured way to sample a population. Sampling is extremely important in quantitative research so results can be generalized to the larger population. Numerous sampling methods are used to identify segments of a given population. *Mixed methods* combine aspects of both models.

Determine Measures – How will the methodology measure the research outcomes? If surveys and questionnaires are used, are there existing instruments available to measure the research questions? Are there verified models available which can be revised, and field tested to ensure they measure what they are purported to measure? If written in English, how will the survey be translated so that respondents understand the intent and meaning of the question? Will there be opportunities to field test surveys and/or a discussion guide with a small segment of the population? If asking for numeric data, what level of precision is required?

Data Collection - How will data be collected or gathered? If a qualitative model is used, how will the interviews be conducted? Will you use mixed gender interview teams or same gender teams? It is a given that an interview team be composed of two people. How long will the interviews last? Are the interviews formal or informal? Who arranges the interview schedule? How will the data be collected and captured to reflect the voice of the interviewed? Who will compile the translation and transcription? Do they have sufficient language, translation, and transcribing skills to accurately reflect the interviewee's voice?

The quantitative model employing surveys and questionnaires must take into account the level of literacy of the population. Questionnaires and surveys are constructed in simple, binary or Likert Scale responses. Pen and pencil surveys have the lowest technology barriers, but literacy may still be an issue. A web-based survey requires access to a web connection and those without an internet connection are excluded from the survey population.

Analysis and Reporting

Analyzing quantitative models usually consist of two aspects – mathematical and statistical analysis and interpretation of the meaning of the analysis. At this point, the data and analysis interact with the research questions. Do the statistics support the research questions? Are there benchmarks for these measures? How do these numbers compare with other benchmarks? What are the trends across the research population? Is there any difference between various segments of the population? Are there any correlations between the research questions? If so, how strong are those correlations? Correlation does not mean causation. Quantitative analysis is all about the numbers.

In **analyzing qualitative** research, one recognizes there is no right or final answer. With a large set of information, the researcher organizes the data by research question and through reasoning and logic begins to sort and categorize the data to create information. These usually take the form of themes which emerge out of the interviews. Based on the interview data and by using a language processing model to extract data, generalized themes and subthemes emerge. These are indicators of issues, problems, or opportunities but do not have a numeric quality. Analyzing themes speaks in terms of strength of opinion and preferences.

Reporting – My preference is to formally share observations and recommendations based on the data, interviews and precedent literature in a written report format. The report offers a brief summary of the context for the research project by defining scope, research questions, sample population, and methodology. Next, the observations from the research team are listed as what the team has observed. The rationale of listing observations first is to assure the organization that the research has heard and understood the current research scope adequately. The observations identify consistent themes and various "data points" upon which recommendations will be made.

Reports are shared with the major sponsors or stakeholders of the research. They are given first access to the observations and recommendations as the responsibility for decision making is theirs. Theirs is the responsibility of acting on the results of the project. After a presentation of findings, a period of question and answer typically follows for clarification of either observations or recommendations.

One caution related to research studies is the level of expectation of change the study creates in respondents when they are asked for their opinion. Understandably, they expect that their voices have been heard and leadership will take the research seriously and take action on the recommendations. The caution I give leadership is if you want to discourage and lose credibility with field staff, conduct a research project, ask for their input and then take no action.

Conclusion

The ultimate question is "Can we measure and assess Kingdom Impact?"

Yes – We can measure and assess what we see, recognizing that God is doing much more than we will ever be able to capture. Our research methods are used to measure and assess what we see.

No – The wind of the Spirit blows where it will and measuring the impact of the Spirit is beyond our research. We are incapable of gathering data and interpreting the long-range impact of God's Kingdom in His world. He is able to do much more than we can measure but in His grace the Lord gives us the privilege of seeing and measuring what He does - not completely or fully, but a glimpse of His work among his people.

Jesus shares a parable in Mark 4:26-29 about a farmer who scattered seed, went to sleep, and nature caused the seeds to sprout and grow. In measuring and assessing for Kingdom impact, we are much like the agriculture agent as we want to know what seed was used, when was it planted, how much rain did the crop receive and what is the yield per acre. Therefore, we want to use the appropriate tools and instruments to understand, measure, and explain the growth and impact of His Kingdom.

Questions: As a researcher, you have been asked to assess and measure what happened in Acts Chapter 2. I would like to you discuss four questions.

1. What is your research objective?
2. What type of research should be used?
3. How would you gather your data?
4. How would you interpret the data?