

ReMAP II Research Process and Key Findings

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Abstract

ReMAP II was a collaborative international study involving 22 nations. Conducted in 2003, this study was commissioned by the Missions Commission of World Evangelical Alliance. ReMAP II identified the 'best practices' for long-term retention of cross-cultural missionaries. This paper provides an overview of the research process and outlines some key findings.

Introduction

Two ReMAP studies were conducted in the past decade.

ReMAP I (or "Reducing Missionary Attrition Project"), a study commissioned by the Mission Commission of World Evangelical Fellowship (now World Evangelical Alliance), sought to:

- identify the core causes of missionary attrition
- determine the extent and nature of the problem
- explore solutions to the problem, and
- deliver products and services to mission agencies and churches worldwide that will help reduce undesirable attrition.

ReMAP I was conducted in 14 missionary sending nations between 1994 and 1996. An international workshop on Missionary Attrition was held at All Nations Christian College, U.K., in April 1996. Subsequently, a book² was published in 1997 with many articles about missionary attrition and helpful suggestions on how to prevent avoidable loss of missionary personnel.

- What helps missionaries to grow into fruitful ministry?
- What helps missionaries to stay in service for the long term, in spite of changing circumstances and needs?
- Which organizational structures and practices provide effective support to missionaries and provide the best environment for productive ministry?

These and other questions were on many minds when the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance prepared for ReMAP II. While the previous study ReMAP I had focused mainly on Missionary Attrition and personal reasons for early return from the field³, ReMAP II centred on Missionary Retention and agency practices.

Hence, ReMAP II or "Retaining Missionaries, Agency Practices". In ReMAP II, we sought to:

- identify "best agency practices" that contribute to missionary retention
- promote "best practices" in the global missions community
- provide tools for mission agencies to strengthen missionary retention

¹ The author was the National Research Coordinator for ReMAP II in Singapore.

² *"Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition"*, William D. Taylor (Editor), William Carey Library, 1997.

³ Detlef Bloecher & Jonathan Lewis, *Further Findings in the Research Data*, pp. 105- 125, in: "Too Valuable to Lose", 1997

But why study “Missionary Retention”? Jim van Meter explains the reasons for ReMAP II as follows: “The retention of personnel is all about stewardship. It is about retaining people for good reasons. It is about the blessing of appropriate changes for the sake of the kingdom of God. It is about minimizing turnover due to inappropriate reasons. All for the purpose of fulfilling the call of God upon the individuals as well as the organization. The (ReMAP II) project highlights those practices and services of mission agencies that contribute most to the retention of good people, while minimizing avoidable turnover.”⁴

Research Process

ReMAP II study involved three phases:

- Phase I was Survey preparation, from October to December 2002
- Phase II was Research and Data analysis, from January to May 2003
- Phase III was Reporting and Training, from June 2003 onwards

During Phase I, the Missions Commission of World Evangelical Alliance approached National Missions Movements in both Old Sending Countries (OSC)⁵ and New Sending Countries (NSC)⁶ and invited them to participate. Each participating country had to appoint a Country Coordinator. In October 2002, Country Coordinators from 20 nations met in London for orientation and to design the ReMAP II questionnaire. We agreed on a total of 98 questions in an 8-paged document. Each Country Coordinator then returned to his/her country to produce the Questionnaire, arrange for questions to be translated into a local language (where necessary), and enlist local volunteers to assist in conducting the survey.

Phase II began in early 2003 with Research projects being launched simultaneously in 22 countries around the world. OSC that participated are: Australia, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, USA, and South Africa. NSC that participated are: Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Hong Kong, India, South Korea, Malaysia, Nigeria, Philippines, and Singapore. The study was confined to missionary agencies⁷ sending long-term⁸ cross-cultural⁹ missionaries. A ReMAP II questionnaire was sent to all known evangelical mission agencies (or “missionary sending bases”) in each country.

The ReMAP II questionnaire contained questions about:

- Ministry Priorities of Missionaries on the field
- Pre-field Screening of Candidates
- Education Level
- Pre-Field Training, Other Training
- Pastoral Member Care
- Agency Operation
- Factors that contribute to on-field effectiveness
- Factors that hinder effectiveness
- Retention Record (What happened to your missionaries?)

⁴ Jim Van Meter, “*Distinctive Practices in High Retention USA Agencies*”, in: *Connections: the Journal of the WEA Missions Commission*, June 2004, Vol. 3 No. 2 pp. 26-29.

⁵ Old Sending Countries (OSC) are mostly from Europe, North America and Australia. They have an average of 60 years experience. South Africa was included in this group due to its long experience in missionary sending.

⁶ New Sending Countries (NSC) are mostly from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They have less than 30 years experience.

⁷ Agency refers to a sending base that is an independent missions, a denominational mission’s department, or a church that sends out missionaries without the assistance of another organization.

⁸ Long-term or career missionaries are expected to serve for at least 3 years.

⁹ Cross cultural missionaries serve in a culture other than their own. Normally they learn a different language and/or make significant cultural adjustment. They may serve within their country or abroad.

ReMAP II asked mission executives about their organisational ethos, leadership practices, and personnel procedures, as well as for personnel data about missionary sending, attrition and retention over a 20 year period (from 1981 to 2000). ReMAP II also asked mission executives to list what they considered as (a) the four factors that contribute most to their missionaries' present effectiveness, and (b) the four factors that most hinder missionaries from attaining their on-field objectives.

The entire ReMAP II study was conducted with utmost confidentiality to protect the identity and responses from individual "missionary sending bases".¹⁰ To ensure confidentiality, we used a research code comprising 2 alphabets¹¹ and 3 numerals¹² on the cover of each questionnaire sent out. This research code enabled us to keep a record of Questionnaires as they were mailed, and to determine those that were returned and those that were not returned.

When questionnaires were returned, they were individually checked for completeness. Each complete questionnaire yielded a dataset for an agency, and this was carefully transcribed onto an Excel worksheet.¹³ Datasets from the 22 countries were eventually merged together into an international database.¹⁴ This pooling together of data was possible due to our agreed survey methodology. The extensive ReMAP II database, built from the responses from 22 countries, consisted of datasets for some 600 mission agencies with almost 40,000 long-term cross-cultural missionaries.¹⁵

Data analysis of the ReMAP II database was facilitated by the mathematical tools available to Excel worksheets. Below are two essential calculations to this study.

In ReMAP II, we wanted to establish the relationship between "Retaining Missionaries" and "Agency Practices". So, we designed some 48 questions on Agency Operation, and we requested mission leaders to do a self-evaluation of their own agency's practices.¹⁶ But mission agencies differ considerably in size: Some sending bases were small agencies with less than 10 missionaries, while others were large organizations with thousands of missionaries. Therefore, when analyzing the data collected, we had to use weighted responses. This meant that each response from an agency was multiplied by that agency's number of active missionaries. Hence, we took into account the number of missionaries actually serving within the agency's working conditions, under its leadership of specific values or convictions.

The main concept in ReMAP II is the term "Retention", which refers to the number of missionaries (R) still in active ministry after a period of time or (t) years of service. From the personnel data submitted by each agency, the annual Retention Rate (RR) for that agency could be calculated as follows: $RR = 10^{((\log R) / t)}$, presuming a uniform probability of coming home.¹⁷ RR measures how many missionaries are retained on the field. RR served as the independent variable to which all organizational factors and practices were related.

Having calculated the RR for each agency that participated in ReMAP II, we grouped the agencies into three equal subgroups according to their Retention Rate: high (H), medium (M) and low (L). Due to significant differences in their mission movements, two separate analyzes were run for Old Sending Countries and New Sending Countries.

¹⁰ Confidentiality meant that no name of church or mission agency appeared on the Questionnaire.

¹¹ The two alphabets used were the ISO country code for the country.

¹² Three numerals were issued in sequence from 001 onwards, so every missionary sending base had a unique code.

¹³ Data entry for each dataset involved typing the answers onto an Microsoft Excel worksheet. A template (sample Excel file) had been prepared and distributed to the Country Coordinators by Dr Detlef Bloecher.

¹⁴ Datasets from each country were forwarded to Dr Detlef Bloecher in Germany, who later merged them to form the international ReMAP II database.

¹⁵ The response rate was between 50 to 90% of the total national mission force.

¹⁶ As evidenced by their time, effort and effectiveness rated on a scale from 1 (= not well done) to 6 (very well done).

¹⁷ Extensive studies by Detlef Bloecher have proved that this is a reasonable assumption.

Phase III began in June 2003 with initial data analysis and discussion of our early findings. Country coordinators met in Vancouver at “Canada 2003 conference”, an international gathering of the various taskforces under the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance. Since then, the Country Coordinators have reported on ReMAP II at one or more workshops of invited mission executives and church leaders in the 22 participating countries. ReMAP II results have also been presented at a few regional conferences. Numerous short reports from participating countries have already been published.¹⁸

Key Findings

We found a strong positive correlation between Missionary Retention and Agency Practices. Some forty specific factors were identified from data analysis of the ReMAP II international database. These factors were especially in the areas of candidate selection, vision and purpose, leadership, communication, personal support, member care, ministry priorities, ministry outcomes, continuous training, finances and home office operations.

We discovered that Missionary Retention involves a complex web of factors, not one factor or a few factors. Agency practices and procedures are generally determined by a composite of an organization’s ethos, values, and purposes. The character and worldview of an agency permeates all aspects of its operations. Indeed, certain factors observed in OSC and NSC expressed their history, culture, church traditions, and expectations of supporting churches.

Although missionary retention has gradually dropped over the past twenty years, it has not decreased in the subgroup of high retaining agencies. These agencies have been flexible enough to change with the times, and to maintain their missionaries’ commitment, loyalty and vision. Thus, high retaining agencies continue to be blessed with experienced staff.

We believe that adopting the best practices of the high retaining subgroup could reduce the “potentially preventable attrition”¹⁹ by 45 % in OSC and 65% in NSC. In addition, best practices could possibly reduce what is often considered as “unpreventable attrition”²⁰ by a larger percentage, namely 55% in OSC and 75% in NSC, due to the performance of the best one-third of their mission agencies.

Detlef Bloecher has summarized the characteristics of “Good practice agencies” as follows:

- They expect well-trained mission candidates and apply careful candidate selection.
- They have effective leadership with good interaction with their missionaries, and a lean quality administration with a servant attitude and flexible structures.
- They provide their missionaries opportunities for continuous training and development of new gifts.
- They encourage their missionaries to actively work towards the continuous improvement of their ministries and their agency’s operations and structures, in order to meet current needs.
- Good practice agencies do not impose these changes from the top, or are they driven by external advice, but they utilise the expertise and insight of their own missionaries.

¹⁸ “*ReMAP II – long-term retention of mission personnel*”, *Connections: the Journal of the WEA Missions Commission*, Vol. 3 No. 2, June 2004. This issue has 21 articles on ReMAP II: 2 editorials, 6 foundational studies including an overarching introduction, and 14 short national reports.

¹⁹ All personal, family, work, team, agency related reasons or dismissal by the agency.

²⁰ For example: normal retirement, illness, loss of visa, expulsion, appointment to leadership in agency’s home office, end of project, completion of a pre-determined limited length of assignment, death in service.

- These agencies understand and value synergy. They work in partnership with other agencies to maximise resources. They do not look at their own success, but for the global kingdom of God.

References

"*Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition*", William D. Taylor (Editor), William Carey Library, 1997

"*ReMAP II affirms the maturation of the younger mission movements of the South*", Detlef Bloecher, in *Connections: the Journal of the WEA Missions Commission*, October 2003, pp. 48-53.

"*ReMAP II – long-term retention of mission personnel*", *Connections: the Journal of the WEA Missions Commission*, Vol. 3 No. 2, June 2004. This issue has 21 articles on ReMAP II consisting 2 editorials, 6 foundational studies, and 14 short national reports. An overarching introduction by Detlef Bloecher, "Good Agency Practices: Lessons from ReMAP II" is included.

[Note: The following are available at the website for World Evangelical Alliance's Library of Resources and Publications. <http://www.WEAresources.org/Publications.aspx>]

ReMAP I & II Articles and files by Detlef Blöecher, in: World Evangelical Alliance's Library of Resources and Publications. A collection of various articles, charts and tables related to the WEA Missions Commission research on attrition and retention. Among these are:

- *ReMAP II Questionnaire*

The Questionnaire used to survey missionary sending agencies for the ReMAP II study on agency practices leading to missionary retention.

- *ReMAP II and Missionary Training*

This article explains how missionary training makes missionaries resilient, in light of ReMAP II. It reports on pre-field missionary training and the educational standards of missionaries from Old Sending Countries of Europe, North America and the Pacific.

- *How Shall They Believe? - Evangelical Missionary Deployment Among Unreached Peoples*

This article examines mission personnel serving among the Unreached, by analyzing data in the extensive ReMAP II database.

- *Member Care Builds Up Mission Personnel*

ReMAP II clearly demonstrates the strong positive correlation between member care and missionary retention, in particular preventative member care. This article points out an impressive investment of the New Sending Countries in member care.

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