

Competence as Intercultural Change Agents: A proposal concerning ministry standards and procedures for Fellowship International personnel

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“Stimulate one another to love and good deeds” – Hebrews 10:24

“We sojourn in the land of learning” – Rob Brynjolfson¹

I. Preamble:

To date I have taken a passive approach to the professional development (PD) of Fellowship International missionary personnel. I have gathered information from them concerning their PD and responded to their requests for assistance so that they could obtain training according to their perceived needs. I have monitored those who have followed a course of PD, encouraged our personnel to consider PD, and presented feasible options for ongoing studies, especially through Northwest and Heritage. The Fellowship International Professional Development Policy (revised March 2007) was prepared to provide general guidelines for managing and overseeing PD pursued by Fellowship International personnel, but it does not provide standards or training initiatives.

This proposal seeks to establish a more pro-active stance for our Fellowship International personnel’s educational needs by proposing standards and procedures as requirements to be met by both current and incoming personnel. We want to be confident that our missionary personnel are on track according to the Fellowship International missions mandate. The action assigned to me at the Jan 2009 Fellowship International staff meeting was “to draft a policy and plan (assessment) to develop a strategy to strengthen our current and future personnel.” This document seeks to fulfill that directive by providing a plan to assess and engage Fellowship International personnel in relevant and impacting PD. “If Fellowship International is not developing the personnel resources under its mandate, then it is not stewarding those resources responsibly in the light of its mission and probably diminishing its capacity to accomplish its mission.”² The greatest investment that our churches make in Fellowship International is in our personnel. It is therefore the responsibility of Fellowship International to challenge and equip them as well as hold them accountable in the area of professional development to ensure that they are performing with effectiveness and impact.

In addition, Dr. Perkins at Northwest Baptist Seminary has asked me to discover ways that Northwest can partner with Fellowship International for the preparation and training of Fellowship International personnel and field leaders. The means for partially fulfilling this desire will also be considered.

In preparing this proposal, I have consulted a number of missions organizations, read several articles and examined material from secular organizations that specialize in setting standards of excellence.

II. Summary of purpose:

The goal of PD for Fellowship International is to have *equipped* personnel. This paper will not focus on general educational standards that provide *information*, but on **competencies** to ensure that Fellowship International missionaries have the skills and tools needed to function well in ministry. In addition, steps to ensure the **implementation** of training as well as an **evaluation procedure** for ministry effectiveness will be suggested to ensure that the training is occurring in an effective and impacting way.

Although Fellowship International does demand foundational knowledge and education prior to acceptance, our primary concern is that missionaries develop effective skills on an ongoing basis that will

¹ Brynjolfson, R. *Effective Equipping of the Cross-Cultural worker through the Ministry Life Cycle*.

Downloaded from online resources from World Evangelical Alliance:

<http://www.wearesources.org/publications.aspx> p. 1.

² Perkins, L. Personal correspondence, May 2009.

enable them to fulfill their ministry objectives. Ministry and leadership skills are the core concern, while educational opportunities provide the support for this core. Therefore academic pursuits are important but considered supplementary to ministry; our focus is to help Fellowship International personnel function effectively within their ministry setting. Towards this goal Fellowship International recognizes the value of collaboration with its Fellowship partners. Not only do these partners have an investment in the Fellowship International task, but they also have essential skills that can enhance the effectiveness of Fellowship International personnel.

Fellowship International's role is to effectively communicate the Christian faith in cross-cultural settings leading to contextualized, sustainable and reproducible expressions of church. This requires Fellowship International personnel to have competencies in four key areas: ***cross-cultural adaption (cultural diversity training), interpersonal relationships, change agent skills (contextualization) and spiritual formation.***

Anyone who has not served in a cross-cultural setting will need to be equipped and such skills must be learned through experience. Furthermore, all those currently developing cross-cultural relationships need to constantly improve their skill as change agents because, in the final analysis, it is impact that validates ministry. Success in ministry requires the ability to develop healthy relationships effectively in stressful situations. The implication for PD is that *all educational pursuits should be worked out in authentic ministry settings under the guidance of an experienced cross-cultural worker or in a cohort setting in order to be effective.*

III. Personnel Distinctions:

Fellowship International has 3 categories of missionary personnel. Their distinct responsibilities call for different levels of development³:

1) Leadership (defining leadership as "direct influence within the people group"). Long-term missionaries in primary ministry roles: i.e., evangelism, church planting, leadership development, those who set the direction of major ministries, those who require an intimate knowledge of the language and the cultural context in order to function effectively. For clarity and precision these will be referred to as cross-cultural leaders.

Development needs: **High competency in intercultural and change agent skills (major concern for PD)**

2) Ministry support personnel: Those who do not have a major role in dealing directly with the target people group, who do not have a major stake in ministry decisions, and whose ministry role is to provide support that allows the cross-cultural leaders to function effectively. These are, for example, teachers and technical personnel, who function in a support role and for whom the demand to know the language and function well cross-culturally is not as high a priority. Their qualification for their task will be determined by the intersection of their profession skill set and the needs of the field. This will be considered on an individual basis.

Development needs: **Focus on cultural survival and support ministry competence (moderate concern for PD)**

3) Short term personnel. Those who have a specific skill set but limited time and cross-cultural experience. Their goal is to enhance the work of the leadership, but this requires supervision. They may not have the language or any prior experience in the culture, but the minimum requirement will be a willingness and ability to cooperate with existing work.

Development needs: **Cultural survival (minor concern for PD)**

IV. Competencies:

³ Thanks to Dr. Larry Perkins for providing insight in this area.

Prerequisite:

All Fellowship International Ministries personnel will be required to demonstrate the following competencies as a prerequisite to deployment. There are four minimal guidelines⁴ that must be evaluated and satisfactorily met before receiving approval to move into ministry under the FIM banner:

First, the candidate must be able to nurture themselves spiritually in a context in which spiritual and emotional support from others is limited.

Second, the candidate must be competent to fulfill the task assigned to a level consistent with the expectations of all parties involved

Third, the candidate must be capable of adjusting to the stress of living in the host culture to the extent of functioning in an emotionally stable and productive manner.

Fourth, the candidate must have developed skills in witnessing and nurturing others in their spiritual growth.

Ongoing:

In addition to the above pre-requisites, there are a number of competencies that need consideration and development on an ongoing basis, depending on personnel distinctions (above). The categories for competencies follow Walter, Choonjaroen, Bartosh and Dodd's E-Model of Cultural effectiveness⁵: Interpersonal Relationships, Adaptability and Task.

1) Leadership:

a. Interpersonal Relationships

- Able to relevantly and effectively engage people with the demands for the transformation that the kingdom of God requires.
- Able to relate in healthy, synergistic ways with colleagues, other believers and those who are not yet believers.

b. Adaptability

- Able to function with knowledge, flexibility and effectiveness within the host culture demonstrating competency in language skills as well as respect and appreciation for the culture.

c. Task

- Able to contextualize the gospel message in ways that resonate with the worldview of the people group.
- Able to recognize and implement expressions of church that are culturally stable and which ensure reproduction and continuity.
- Able to recognize leadership as a cultural phenomenon and speak the leadership language of that culture. They appreciate the biblical understanding of Kingdom leadership and are developing leaders that can function effectively in that context.⁶

2) Ministry support personnel

a. Interpersonal Relationships

⁴ Adapted from guidelines provided by David Tai-Woong Lee in "Cross-cultural Servants" in *Working your way to the Nations: A Guide to Effective Tentmaking*, Downers Grove: IVP 27-40. p. 32.

⁵ Dodd, C. 1982, 1998. *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication*, fifth edition. Boston: McGraw Hill, p. 176

⁶ Thanks to Dr Larry Perkins to point out the lack of national leadership development in these competencies.

- Able to relate in healthy, synergistic ways with colleagues, other believers and those who are not yet believers.
 - b. Adaptability
 - Able to function with knowledge, flexibility and effectiveness within the host culture demonstrating adequate language skills for day to day tasks as well as respect and appreciation for the culture.
 - c. Task
 - Able to fulfill their role in a manner that supports and enables the ministry of the leadership.
- 3) Short term personnel
- a. Interpersonal Relationships
 - Able to relate in healthy ways with missionary personnel, other believers and those who are not yet believers.
 - b. Adaptability
 - Able to be flexible and patient as well as respectful for and appreciative of the culture.
 - Willing to endure the discomfort of uncertainty.
 - c. Task
 - Able to serve for the benefit of the mandate of the whole Fellowship International missionary team serving in that context.

V. Professional Development (PD) of Competencies

Following Kohls' pedagogical distinctions⁷, the PD of Fellowship International personnel will consist of four levels: **Education, Training, Orientation and Briefing**.

Education refers to "content knowledge and is often used to develop in-depth mastery of one or more subjects." Unless otherwise indicated "Education" will refer to pre-requisite formal education obtained before a candidate become Fellowship International personnel. This requirement will vary depending upon both the category of personnel (leadership / support / short term) and the nature of the task assigned (eg. church planter, medical, etc.)

Training refers to "developing competency in performing specific skills, or meeting specified objectives in a cost effective manner." This will be a requirement for long term personnel (leadership / support) in order to ensure ongoing development of needed competencies.

Orientation refers to initial preparation so that a person can "understand and function effectively in a new or radically different environment and [achieve] this shift in the least traumatic manner." This will be a goal for all personnel working in a cross-cultural situation for the first time.

Briefing "provides a broad overview or can focus on a particular part of a large program in the most time effective way." This will be necessary for all personnel who have been given a new assignment to ensure that they are aware of the responsibilities and parameters of the task.

Ideally, the missionary will have obtained the education portion (eg. Bible college education, see below) before beginning ministry. However, if this is not the case, Fellowship International will either set a time sensitive probationary period whereby the missionary will be able to fulfill those foundational requirements as they serve within Fellowship International, or encourage them to fulfill the requirements before being accepted with Fellowship International.

The second level of **ongoing training and development** can be outsourced, accomplished in partnership with another institution (eg., other Fellowship institutions, such as Northwest), or through

⁷ Kohls, LR 1995. Education, Training, Orientation and Briefing Compared in Training Know-how for Cross-Cultural and Diversity Trainers. L. Robert Kohls and Herbert L. Brussow (eds). Duncanville: Adult Learning Systems. 9-11.

Fellowship International initiated training. This allows for a number of pathways for PD, while ensuring that training is provided for those critical areas identified by Fellowship International.

Specifics for each Fellowship International personnel will be designed individually according to the following five areas:

- **Theory** (the academic background / degrees)
- **Process** (they understand and follow procedures that allow them to accomplish their ministry goals)
- **Testing for abilities** (they have been assessed for the calling, gifting and skills that match the assigned task)
- **Experience** levels and opportunities (they have spent time working in a positive environment similar to their proposed cross-cultural ministry setting)
- **Evaluation and recognition** (they have been successful according to the benchmarks approved by Fellowship International, and their efforts have been recognized)

NOTE: All Fellowship International missionary personnel will be accepted conditional to completion of the education requirements and with the understanding that ongoing training and development is mandatory. If they are accepted prior to the completion of entry level requirements, the acceptance will have a time sensitive probationary period to allow for the completion of those requirements.

Benchmarks for PD levels

1. Leadership

Education:

- A degree in Bible / theology or its equivalence.
- 5 years experience in their area of ministry leadership while being mentored by an experienced leader. As with language learning, missionary personnel are not expected to be able to function in an independent fashion until they have reached a level of competency in a mentored setting.
- Intercultural training for successful relationships and effective living in a cross-cultural setting.
- Instruction in interpersonal skills and teamwork principles.
- Readings concerning missions, culture, contextualization, leadership and the specific people group of concern.

Training and ongoing Development:

- Further education and training relevant to and building capacity for ministry leadership.
- Ongoing training in culture, missions, teamwork and interpersonal skills.
- Peer reviews and cohort educational opportunities.

Orientation and Briefing: as required per specific setting.

2. Ministry Support Personnel

Education:

- Cross-cultural training for successful relationships and effective living.
- Instruction in interpersonal skills and teamwork principles.
- Adequate training for the specific role in which they are participating (not a responsibility of Fellowship International)
- One year Bible college or equivalent.
- Readings concerning missions and the specific people group of concern.

Training and ongoing Development:

- Further training for their support role will be based on their ministry needs and will probably need to be outsourced.
- Further training in culture, missions and interpersonal skills is encouraged with opportunities to participate in the Fellowship International arranged training.

Orientation and Briefing: as required per specific setting.

3. Short term Personnel

Education:

- Awareness of Short Term Missions Standards
- Survival level Cross-cultural training and team dynamics.
- Introductory sessions and / or reading for missions and the specific people group of concern.

Training and ongoing Development: none

Orientation and Briefing: as required per specific setting.

VI. Training and ongoing development for leadership:

The ongoing training arranged by Fellowship International will focus on four key areas (reflecting the E-Model of cultural effectiveness):

1. **Soft skills (focusing on Interpersonal Relationships)**
2. **Culture / worldview skills (focusing on Adaptability to the context)**
3. **Change agent skills (focusing on Strategic approaches to Ministry)**
4. **Spiritual Formation (focusing on the Vitality of our Relationship with God)**

The first and second of these areas reflect the findings of ReMAP 1 (Too Valuable to Lose)⁸. The third one reflects a concern for Fellowship International personnel to be effective and worthy of the support of the churches who send them (Note: Brynrolfson, quotes missiologist Don Smith as estimating that only 10% of all western missionaries are truly effective. Brynrolfson also mentions Myron Loss who says that 75% of missionaries do not function effectively)⁹. All four areas require a *contextual* orientation in order to have value for Fellowship International. That is, any course, training, or seminar will be presented as an intentional and guided exercise of the missionary personnel to view and shape the expertise of others through the cultural grids of *their* context, rather than presented as abstract or universal principles.

“Adapting to another culture [requires the] transferring of needed information, observing modelled [*sic*] behaviour and practicing the desired skill until proficient.”¹⁰ This reality necessitates ongoing training, because the latter two aspects – observation and practice – can only occur within the people group the cross-cultural leader is seeking to reach. Because of this reality, the majority of significant and effective ministry developments in a cross-cultural leader’s life will occur while they are in ministry. Missionary formation is facilitated through training that allows the cross-cultural leader to significantly engage new material within their context.

Rationale for focusing on these four areas:

a. *Life and ministry is about relationships.* Soft skills allow the cross-cultural leaders to work competently with others in the context of cultural, philosophical and values clashes, thus providing a healthy context for successful and fulfilling cross-cultural ministry leadership. Furthermore, a focus on relationships emphasizes the concern for community within the Christian faith. By stimulating people to work together and sharpen each other within their context, the work is enhanced through synergy. An additional factor in

⁸ Taylor, W. Ed. *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1997, p. 92.

⁹ Brynrolfson, *Effective Equipping*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 4.

intercultural ministry is that people have different culturally shaped “languages of respect,” that need to be learned and utilized. Skill in identifying and addressing cultural causes of disunity (eg. tribalism, caste differences) are also a concern.

b. *Culture / worldview is the unique aspect of Fellowship International ministry (compared to other FEB ministries)*. Without proper cultural adaptation, the cross-cultural worker will not be able to function with effectiveness, and much damage to themselves, their colleagues and the gospel message can result. An understanding of culture may be presented theoretically in academic settings, but it is only internalized through experience within the ministry context. Fellowship International’s concern is to help cross-cultural leaders process their *in situ* experiences in light of the theory. Engaging the culture with clarity provides an essential filter that will color the other two areas of concern.

c. *Fellowship International cross-cultural leaders are change agents*. Assumptions need to be continually challenged in light of the impact that is being made in the people group. If cross-cultural leaders fail in the area of contextualization, they will fail to communicate the gospel, and an indigenous church will not emerge. Other perspectives (both national and ex-pat) need to be brought into the picture by those who lead in similar circumstances in order to stimulate self-evaluation and encourage unity and teamwork.

d. *Fellowship International cross-cultural leaders are ambassadors of the kingdom*. As such it is essential that they adopt a lifestyle and practices that reflects their covenant commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. While personally shaped and culturally expressed, this will be informed by biblical principles and the input of fellow believers.

Criteria for ongoing training programs (How we at Fellowship International assess the value of training programs):

Any course or program of instruction from an academic institution is of limited value if the instructors are not able to assist our Fellowship International personnel to reshape and re-identify the material through the cultural grids of their context. “Effective missionary training centers are consciously and intentionally oriented toward character and skills development for cross-cultural ministry.”¹¹ It is insufficient for a North American institution to provide information and education fitting for a North American setting or with claims of universality and *not* provide the means and expertise to help bridge the contextual gap so that our workers are provided tools, insights and skills that are relevant for their context. Put positively, the only training that is of value to our leaders is training through which the teaching provided is contextualized so that the leader finds it relevant and worthwhile for their setting.

Therefore the criteria for assessing training programs will be:

- a. **Interpersonal Development**. The training session must enhance the ability of the cross-cultural leader to relate effectively with others.
- b. **Cultural relevance**. The training session must relate directly and clearly to the cultural setting of concern to the cross-cultural leader.
- c. **Ministry relevance**. The training session must impact the ability of the cross-cultural leader to be an effective change agent.

VII. Implementation

1. In order to bring this to a reality, the CILD will need to initiate, coordinate and monitor:

¹¹ Ferris, R. *Standards of Excellence in Missionary Training Centers*. Downloaded from online resources from World Evangelical Alliance: <http://www.wearesources.org/publications.aspx> p. 2-3.

Cohort interactions (cf. OMF criteria: “We will foster shared learning, within the organization and without. What are the ways in which what a missionary learns is benefiting other missionaries”¹²)

Mentoring relationships (As mentioned above, those new to cross-cultural ministry need mentoring. Even though they have *education*, their training is not complete).

Involvement with other Fellowship agencies or outside institutions (This is currently being coordinated and monitored by the CILD)

2. The CILD will initiate a process of self-evaluation for current missionary personnel in the area of entry level education requirements.
3. All Fellowship International candidates will be assessed according to requirements for entry level education. This will be the responsibility of those staff who recommend a candidate for acceptance.
4. The CILD will provide Fellowship International training in the four key areas through the following formats:
 - a. Each year one day of Missions Institute will be dedicated to a focus on “competence as intercultural change agents.”
 - b. Each year the CILD and the Fellowship International church planting coach will visit a field for a week of teaching / study / debriefing on competency as an intercultural change agent. This will be done in conjunction with a pastor / professor who teaches a course. The guest pastor / prof will present a course / material that relates to at least one of the four key areas. The role of the CILD will be to ensure that the course is appropriately contextualized (culture / worldview analysis skills). The role of the church planting coach will be to relate the course to church planting principles (application of the material towards leadership development and strengthening the body of Christ). *NOTE: This is an area in which cooperation between Fellowship International and Northwest would be appreciated. Northwest can provide expertise in the area of leadership and leadership development from a biblical and academic standpoint. By bringing the CILD, Northwest and the church planting coach together with their unique concerns and perspectives, each of the keys areas identified above can be addressed causing our personnel to reflect deeply and seriously evaluate and challenge their current practices. (For implementation, we could start with 3 days added on to an already happening conference, coupled with preparatory reading/assessments - possibly questionnaires which would be filled in and evaluated/assessed ahead of time. The 3 days would involve some teaching, but also personal interaction based on specific things which arise out of the advance preparation/dialogue.)*
 - c. The CILD will provide resources / seminars for the member care people and for the director to use on their trips. These will be based on the goals of competence for intercultural Change agents.
5. The CILD will track the effects of Fellowship International training initiatives on the missionaries who participate using the following criteria:¹³
 - **Needs Identification:**
 - Indication that any change in practice gained from the training resulted in positive impact in areas related to the key competencies.

¹² From OMF International Handbook related to Study Leave (quoted in personal communication with Robert Konieczny).

¹³ adapted from <http://www.astd.org/ASTD/aboutus/AwardsandBestPractices/excellenceInPracticeAwards/> as well as influence from OMF International Handbook related to Study Leave (quoted in personal communication with Robert Konieczny).

- **Design Values:**
 - Evidence that any application of the training was implemented in a way that considered the best interests of the missions organization as well as those of the people group
- **Alignment:**
 - Evidence of, and degree of alignment with, other training, learning, and performance improvement practices, as well as organizational goals, to achieve desired outcomes
 - Evidence of enhanced partnerships within and outside the missions organization
- **Evaluation Strategy:**
 - Evidence of a clear, measurable, and feasible evaluation plan
- **Interpersonal Impact:**
 - Evidence of actual or anticipated individual/team impact (short-term and long-term)
 - Evidence of changes in attitudes and behaviors as a result of training
- **Shared Learning:**
 - Indications that this practice can be transferred and replicated
 - Extent of the diffusion of this practice in the field
 - Opportunities for other professionals to learn from this practice.

How does this proposal compare with other missions organizations?

1. New Tribes Mission¹⁴ focuses on adequate *preparation* of missionaries for their ministries. In addition to requiring a Bible college (or equivalent) foundation in Bible knowledge, they also have a two-year training program. For ongoing training, they have consultants in the area of translation, church planting, literacy etc. to assist missionaries in ministry. They also host different conferences and seminars for their own personnel to meet specific needs.

2. Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF International)¹⁵ has a number of in-house initiatives such as the *Timothy Project* (8 weeks over 2 years to develop members in their life and ministry skills), *New Leaders Development Course* (2 weeks for emerging Leaders to prepare them for leadership positions), *Team Leadership* (2 week seminars where teams learn to work in unity and diversity) as well as an extensive *Mentoring of Field and Homeside Leaders* (2 years with a senior Mentor). All of this is facilitated by the International Director for Member Development and implemented by various teams around the globe. These courses/seminars/mentoring initiatives are supplemented by a series of Manuals that have been produced for the OMF Membership.

3. WorldVenture (CBIInternational)¹⁶ requires all workers on regular HA and those who have not attended Renewal Conference within six years to attend Renewal Conference and any other required CBI training initiatives. WV also conducts training called the “Asia Leader’s Summit.” So far, these have been conducted every other year. Designed specifically for Field Leaders, they focus pointedly on leadership development.

¹⁴ From Personal Correspondence with Frank Vander Meulen.

¹⁵ From OMF International Handbook related to Study Leave (quoted in personal communication with Robert Konieczny).

¹⁶ WorldVenture Policies and Practices, p. 24.