

Executive Summary: The IMPACT Field Leader's Pilot Project

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In cultivating relevant and sustainable cross-cultural mission impact, a crucial and complex role is that of the field leader (e.g. team, country and area leaders). Field leaders have first-line oversight in leading field staff in their personal well-being and work effectiveness. In 2007 a pilot survey was created to ascertain the real needs and dynamics of field leaders through a partnership of Barnabas International and Global Mapping International. Three North American sending agencies participated, with 84 field leaders responding (84% response rate). The following is a brief summary of the findings.

Many field leaders are new in their roles.

Of the field leaders surveyed 47% have been in their positions for three years or less (11% for less than one year). It was also discovered that only 54% had received any orientation, and that 64% stated that their orientation did not provide significant help in moving into their present role.

Most leaders have two or more roles.

Of the 84 field leaders surveyed, 61 (72%) reported that they have two or more jobs, spending 29 hours a week or less in their field leader roles. The need to combine multiple, demanding roles has ramifications on a leader's health and effectiveness, including in family roles.

The majority of leaders feel empowered.

Most leaders said they had a good relationship with their supervisors (81%) and received valuable feedback from them (71%). They also felt they had appropriate decision-making authority and the freedom to experiment or innovate.

Basic management tools are in use, but effective use is inconsistent

Written job descriptions were held by 81% of surveyed leaders and 75% had set goals for their leadership role. Also, 75% had personal development plans. Yet, there is concern when 20-25% of the field leaders do not practice these basic management practices. It is also unclear if these tools are effectively used in designing leader practice, personal growth or ministry impact.

Mission teams are increasingly multi-national.

Only 22% of those surveyed lead teams with one nationality while 44% supervise three or more nationalities. However, only 47% of the leaders have had training for this complex dynamic.

Personal supervisory skills and conflict resolution skills are a weakness.

Leaders graded themselves positively in general relational skills (affirmation – 53%; listening – 45%), but identified basic people management skills as a weak area (feedback-49%, resolving conflict-36%, and speaking with candor-36%). This might be the reason that 39% identified “helping ineffective missionaries become effective” as a weakness.

Personal spirituality and family life have inconsistent responses.

The majority (82%) say they have the ability to give proper balance to work and family, yet 21% say this area is a struggle. Intimacy with Christ is stronger since assuming their role (66%), yet 26% identify this same area as a present weakness. Only 26% identified this area as a strength. Leaders of three years or less have a greater struggle in both areas. Further study is needed.

Organizational behavior impacts field leaders' perspective.

Effective organizational change and mission leader communication were highly related to their positive sense of the mission's direction, but both areas were rated as needing improvement.

Other significant findings and detailed recommendations regarding field leader's realities and development can be found in a more in-depth report: “IMPACT Field Leader's Survey: Fascinating findings from a pilot research project on the needs and realities of field leaders.”