

Impact Survey 2009-Executive Summary

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One hundred and ninety-three field-based leaders from four cross-cultural mission agencies have participated in the 2009 *Impact* Field Leader Survey to date. Their responses have substantiated and added to the findings of the 2007-08 pilot survey in which three North American sending agencies took part. The study* is part of a cooperative effort between Barnabas International and Global Mapping International, with an express purpose:

To identify, in partnership with mission organizations, the issues that impact the effectiveness of a field leader's ministry and life so that mission organizations and leadership ministries can provide more relevant support and development.

Note: *The following remarks are based on the aggregate data of the four organizations. Each organization scheduled its own feedback session with Impact team members.*

Big jobs, inadequate preparation, and overwhelmed leaders:

Field leaders participating in the study have responsibilities not only for developing and communicating ministry vision, but also for caring for and directing the development of missionaries in localized, country, or regional areas.

The *Impact* survey found that

- **40% of the field leaders queried have been in their new roles 3 years or less.**
- **70% acknowledged that they received no orientation, coaching, or training specific to their current role.**
- **55% reported that they dedicate 29 hours or less to their field leader roles each week.**

The latter finding indicates that the majority **divide their responsibilities between field leadership and the ongoing ministries** for which they entered cross-cultural service originally. That multiple-role focus is especially true for the 71% designated as "team leaders" - those who have the primary oversight of on-the-ground missionaries. Admittedly, the dual hands-on ministry and the field leader role have enormous benefits. Yet the findings clearly show that the responsibilities result in frequent frustration. The leaders consistently confessed that they are bogged down with their responsibilities; they are given inadequate administrative support; and they feel unable to adequately develop and serve the missionaries under their care because of time constraints.

A positive experience, but challenged in personal life:

Most field leaders report that their experience has been rich and growing in spite of inconsistent training or support. Yet a disheartening number (22-34%) revealed the **struggle to remain joyful and to find quality time for life balance and family**. In addition, a significant number

(19-22%) questioned whether they are **using their gifts appropriately** and if they are accomplishing something **worthwhile for the Kingdom**. 18% confessed that they have difficulty handling **internal tension and stress**. A growing number of respondents indicated that they were attracted to practices that are self-defeating or spiritually destructive, and very possibly precarious for their organizations.

Allegiance to their organizations:

Each participating agency has unique strengths and distinctives that their field leaders applaud. Yet, the four organizations also share the following common organizational characteristics that encourage their field leaders:

1. the agencies are intentionally changing to ensure **relevance in the future**;
2. they give their field leaders the **authority they need to be effective**;
3. they **encourage experimentation and innovation**;
4. and they **allow for mistakes without reprisal**.

When offered the opportunity to write freely, many field leaders noted the **presence of and need for continuing relevant training toward their long-term effectiveness**. The field leaders overwhelmingly expressed their **passion for and commitment to their calling and to the ministry upon which their organizations focus**.

Greatest challenges:

Several factors reduced the field leaders' positive view of their agency:

- **inadequate ways of introducing and implementing change**;
- **ineffective communication** by executive leadership;
- **inability to manage conflict well**;
- **lack of sufficient resources for their own development**;
- and **lack of resources for the field leader role**.

Often overshadowing the positive aspects of the field leaders' work are the challenges of **"aleness" in their responsibilities coupled with a fears of losing integrity or letting their people down**. This aleness is related, to a degree, to their inadequate on-the-job support by their supervisor. This sense is confirmed by the percentage (39%) that said they have **no regularly scheduled meetings** with their supervisor. 40% reported that they had not had constructive feedback from their supervisors in the past year. 70% revealed that their supervisors never ask them about the "condition of their soul or their relationship with God." Such responses would indicate a growing need for consistent, "wholistic" oversight for field leaders.

"If only . . ."

The most frequent desires expressed by the surveyed 2009 field leaders included **clear, concise, and consistent communication by executive leadership and intentional training and/or coaching for their own personal and professional development**.

For More Information: Harder, K. and Foote, C. (2016) *Helping Your Missionaries Thrive: Leadership Practices that Make a Difference*. Global Mapping International. (Available for purchase through Best Christian Workplaces Institute <https://www.bewinstitute.org/request-info/>)