Research in Hostile Environments
by Bert Hickman

Researchers are a curious lot: we are always asking questions and seeking to learn more. One of the challenges we face is deciding what is enough – enough questions, enough respondents, enough information – and what the consequences of asking for too much, in the wrong way, or at the wrong time might be. When supervising or conducting research in hostile situations, we need to be especially mindful of what the goal and possible applications are. Based on those "end criteria," we should sort out what we really need to know from those things we would like to know but that are not essential. This might feel frustrating at times. Yet adopting a "less is more" philosophy can be an important part of safeguarding both the data collected and the researchers themselves.

In my role as Director of Research for RUN Ministries (https://www.runministries.org/), I serve researchers from a large family of house church movements. I posed a series of questions to their leadership to gain a better understanding of how they conduct research in hostile environments, and this article reflects their insights.

Carefully choosing respondents is one concern. The leaders noted that they "only conduct research in secure places and with known, trusted people." That includes building relationships with people who might be useful sources of information. The need for safe respondents is thus likely to preclude certain types of research (such as "person-on-the-street" interviews).

Safeguarding of data is one of the greatest needs when conducting research in difficult environments. One way of doing this, of course, it to store the data in safe locations. Even so, to ensure that information is not intercepted or compromised, researchers at times have had to destroy flash drives, hard drives, or computers. This highlights the need to have backup data secured in other safe locations. In addition, researchers pass information to one another only during face-to-face encounters. They do not use the internet or social media. This increases the cost and complexity of conducting research, but it is also necessary to protect the lives of the researchers and the participants in the research.

Indeed, every year some researchers are martyred as they try to relay information to the leaders. They consider it part of the cost of doing research in hostile environments, noting that "this is the price first-generation believers must pay to grow the movement." That might seem shocking to some of us who live in situations without such dangers. It certainly does not imply that they are cavalier in their approaches. But it does mean that these researchers have counted the cost, including the possibility of death, and deemed it not too much to pay for work that will strengthen existing believers and open the door to more people coming to faith in places where the gospel has never been proclaimed.

Be especially sensitive in such situations to those who are from an "honor and shame" culture, as failures (or perceived failures), including persecution and martyrdom, might provoke a sense of shame on the part of researchers or leaders. Because of this, they might feel a reluctance to share details of the situation. These can be times when you will experience that tension between wanting and needing to know.

When I asked, "How does your research in hostile environments differ from your research in safer environments?" the reply I received was, "We have no experience in doing research in an environment where our lives are not at risk." Do not imagine, however, that research in hostile environments brings only difficulty. I also asked, "Why do you think research in hostile environments is worthwhile, despite the risks?" To this the leaders replied, "This is our life. We have nothing to compare it to. But research is important because it helps us pray and send the Jesus Nation to different peoples."

In reading their replies, I was reminded of the great hymn of Philippians 2:5–11. Surely these researchers are showing the mind of Christ, having humbled themselves even unto death in their quest to be obedient, with the goal of every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!

Please see the Special Profile on Page 3 to get to know Bert a bit better.

Practical Considerations for Doing Research in Security-Sensitive Settings
by Larry Kraft

My team and I have learned much during our years of collecting data for mission strategy in "closed" countries where there is a certain hostility toward the Christian church and mission activities. In order to understand a local context and its needs, such that the Church can help its ministers and leaders in these places, it is best to gather information in a non-threatening way.

First, we've discovered that we must be careful what name we give to obtaining our required information. For example, in many languages the word used for "research" is the same word used for intelligence gathering by secret police. If we say we are doing "research," this can raise suspicions resulting in unreliable results due to interviewees feeling reluctant to disclose the truth. The best solution is to arrange for cultural and contextual insiders to ask questions in appropriate ways and in non-threatening settings. One method that has worked well for us is to invite an insider partner to memorize our survey questions and take interviewees out for coffee or tea, incorporating our research questions into their conversations. This avoids the intimidating presence of a clipboard and note-taking. After each conversation, however, it is imperative that the interviewer be diligent to record the answers immediately, before doing another interview. This lowers the possibility of contaminating the answers of one person with information from another.

The next concern is how to record and store the data safely and securely. We have found we can set up an on-line survey on a secure site and allow interviewers to record responses into that on-line survey. This is more secure and safer than trying to carry paper interview sheets out of a country through customs. Another option is to use an encryption program like veracrypt (https://www.veracrypt.fr/en/Home.html) to make an encrypted file container that can be shared on line via Dropbox, Google docs, Onedrive, etc., carried on a USB drive, or emailed if the container file is small enough. Research data should always be stored in an encrypted container in case the researcher's computer is compromised. In this way, field researchers can type the responses from their interviews into documents or spreadsheets which can be accessed in a "safe" location for analysis. In some contexts, field workers are comfortable with password protecting document, spreadsheet, and PDF files. It is best to not email the password, but to share it in person or on an encrypted VOIP call.

Proper research etiquette normally requires informed consent with signature to use the results of an interview in one's research. This is especially true if the research is being conducted under the supervision of an academic institution, as all procedures, protocols, and publications must comply with institutional standards for methodologies and governmental standards for data storage. We

have found, however, that the requirement for an identifying signature can be waived if an interviewee might be put in danger if their name were to be made public. Therefore, when doing interviews of converts in a security-sensitive setting, we make certain that the interviewee understands that our questions are being asked as part of data gathering, but generally we do not insist on signed consent for the protection of our brothers and sisters who remain living there. In addition, we never make a voice recording of a conversation without the awareness and permission of the interviewee. This probably should go without saying, but we have heard of fellow missions researchers who have violated this principle unawares.

As the Church of Jesus Christ grows and prospers among those who are hostile to the Good News, we need to take seriously our responsibility to protect our brothers and sisters as we do research to help them be more effective in their Gospel outreach. Much good information can be gathered to assist local churches in these regions, and we have seen many good insights come from on-the ground interviews of new believers and those who seek to follow Christ in such settings.

See You There!

We are aware that Information Workers are scheduled to attend the upcoming WEA Mission Commission's Global Consultation in Chiang Mai, January 30 - February 3, 2023. Such gatherings provide great opportunities to catch up and swap stories about Mission Information work. If you'd like to share a meal or just a coffee in Chiang Mai, please let us know at info@globalcmiw.org. We'll help make the connections.

Preparations for Lausanne 4
by Matthew Niermann

In September 2022, the Lausanne Movement hosted an interactive breakout session during the Mission Information Worker Virtual Conference. The interactive sessions invited participants to discuss the question, "What are the indicators of the Great Commission?" To do so, the session broke into three smaller groups focused on identifying indicators within three discrete stages of the discipleship process: Making Disciples; Maturing Disciples; Mobilizing Disciples. Each participant was able to attend two breakouts and focus on two of the discipleship phases.

All three breakout discussions produced 25-50 Great Commission indicators and a substantive list of existing global data sets measuring some of these indicators. A review of the results showed that indicators of Making Disciples and Mobilizing Disciples have more readily available global data sets which are actively measuring these indicators on a regional and global scale. Additionally, it is observed that while there were a lot of indicators generated for Maturing Disciples, there exists very little global data or initiatives to measure such activities.

Following the interactive session, the Lausanne team preparing the State of the Great Commission report for L4 continues to analyze and review the data. Additionally, several individuals from the sessions continue to engage with the L4 process and are providing their valuable voice and expertise to the project. Feel free to contact Matthew Niermann, Ph.D. with any inquiries at mniermann@lausanne.org.

Thanks
Matthew Niermann, Ph.D. - mniermann@lausanne.org
L4 | State of the Great Commission Report

What an Opportunity!!

We are pleased to announce the second virtual Mission Information Workers Conference from Monday April 17th to Thursday 20th 13:00 to 15:00 UTC each day. The purpose of the conference is to accelerate the development of the mission information and the mission information community. There will likely be consideration of mission data standards, gaps in global mission data, training of mission information workers and development of national mission information work. The conference is sponsored by the Community of Mission Information Workers (CMIW), Lausanne Research & Strategic Information Network and Harvest Information Standards (HIS).

Register here:
https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUrdO2trD4jHNb-SgUEXJ8-WNv3BW26xGUo

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Special Profile: Bert Hickman

1) [CMIW] **Please tell us about yourself and your family.**

Well, my immediate family is just me! I am a life-long bachelor (so far). But I truly have been blessed with many brothers and sisters in the Lord all over the US and the world who share in my life. I grew up in Northwest Florida and have lived in four other states as well, in addition to Norway, where I was a youth worker in an international church through the Southern Baptist Foreign (now International) Mission Board's Journeyman program.

My original educational and work background is in engineering and applied science (which seems not uncommon among mission information workers!) – specifically chemical engineering, radiation protection, and toxicology. After working in the intellectual property and environmental health fields, I attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where I discovered the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC). I was immediately captivated by the fact that it was a place where research and missions could be combined. Prior to my current ministry, I spent more than ten years at the CSGC as a research associate and senior research associate, and I still work with them on some projects.

2) [CMIW] **What is your current ministry?**

For the last five years I have served as Director of Research for RUN Ministries (www.runministries.org). RUN equips first-generation Christian leaders from within the 10/40 Window, providing evangelistic media tools, a culturally sensitive discipleship model, and practical skills for their ministries to become self-sustaining. In my role, I help indigenous researchers build their research capacity. I also aid RUN staff in interpreting the results of this research to supporters and ministry partners.

3) [CMIW] **What are the contributions you have made to world missions that have brought you the greatest satisfaction?**

I think my greatest satisfaction has come from partnering with indigenous researchers to empower them to do quality research in their own contexts and on their own work. As a result, church planting teams have been sent to dozens of previously unengaged unreached people groups and seen millions of people come to faith in Jesus.

4) [CMIW] **What dreams do you have for your next ten years of ministry?**

Over the next ten years I would like to see more researchers equipped for work in their fields and more ways for them to tell their stories to the rest of the global church. It would also be good to find someone to mentor to replace me when that time comes.

5) [CMIW] **Is there some way you'd be willing to help the CMIW community?**

I'm happy to talk about the process our researchers use in doing their work. I also have done and continue to do a fair bit of editing work, so I am available to look over things CMIW members have written if they need another set of eyes.

Information from the Word
by Bill Morrison (November 2022)

"*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known …..Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'*" Rom 15: 20-21
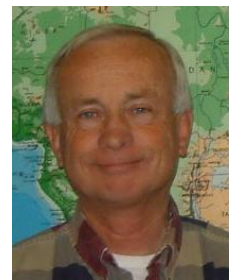
We see here the priority Paul placed on taking the gospel to unengaged and unreached peoples. This is not to suggest all Christian outreaches should have this same priority, but for some, "pioneering" work is a priority. This priority in turn suggests the need for data. Data that reveals where the gospel message is not generally known. Would Paul welcome the information of this kind which is available today? We suggest he would welcome it with open arms.

Note

CMIW bulletins include links to important websites related to the bulletin content. We on the CMIW Editorial Team are vigilant about security concerns in connection with those links and test them carefully before including them in our bulletins. That is why the links are normally spelled out, so that readers can be assured of the site being linked. At the same time, links that we consider unwieldy in length are normally embedded in the bulletin's main text. As an exercise in reader vigilance, the editorial team encourages readers to examine embedded links before clicking on them – a habit we encourage everyone to maintain in all electronic reading.

Final Details:

- With the help of God this bulletin is now produced quarterly in English, Portuguese and Spanish.
- The Editorial Team is composed of Duane Frasier, Larry Kraft, Nelson Jennings, Rodrigo Tinoco and Stephanie Kraft.
- Please send any comments, suggestions or ideas to us at info@globalcmiw.org.
- Back issues can be found at www.globalcmiw.org/cmiwbulletin.