

***CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND SHORT-TERM MISSIONS** **The phenomenon of the 15-year-old missionary**

Long before Starbucks was selling lattes in Bangkok and centuries before one could fly to virtually anywhere in the world within 24 hours, Christian missionaries and the locals they encountered engaged in cross-cultural interaction. Missionaries have been leaving their homelands to do the work of Jesus for nearly 2,000 years. In fact, some of the earliest research on intercultural relationships originated in studying missionary activity.

However, just as globalization is transforming the way nearly every profession does its work, so also is the “missionary profession” undergoing a major shift. Throughout most of the history of Christian missions, the vast majority of missionaries have been lifelong “professionals” who raised financial support, studied local languages and customs, and packed all their earthly belongings in a coffin to take to the mission field. Though those kinds of lifelong missionary professionals still exist (referred to as “long-term missionaries” hereon) far more common today are “short-term missionaries” who serve as missionaries for two weeks at a time or less.

A typical American¹ missionary today is a 15-year-old who sends out a few letters seeking financial support, gets a passport and plane ticket, and goes to serve as a “missionary” for ten days to two weeks. Nearly one third of all American high school students participate in some kind of religious cross-cultural experience before they graduate from high school. In fact, it’s hard to be deemed a legitimate church ministry for youth these days without running a full-fledged, short-term missions program. More than 5.5 million 13-17 year old Americans have cumulatively gone on more than 11.5 million mission trips. This involves more than 2 million trips a year just for this age bracket.²

Though these kinds of “missionaries” are most often high school and college students, more and more families, adults, and senior citizens are participating as well. According to Robert Wunthrow, Princeton sociologist of religion, about 1.6 million American church members (Protestants and Catholics) participated in short-term missions trips outside the U.S. during the year 2005. And an additional unknown number traveled within the United States doing similar kinds of work in cross-cultural contexts (e.g. rebuilding efforts in New Orleans, development work in West Virginia, or evangelistic outreach in New York City). Most of these trips are two weeks or less, a timing, which fits well into school

holidays or one's annual vacation. In contrast to the millions of short-term missionaries traveling annually, there are about 60,000 long-term American missionaries living overseas.

Though the short-term missionary phenomenon seems to have the most momentum in the U.S., it has parallel movements in other parts of the world. Christians in the United Kingdom, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, and even in places like Russia, Uganda, and Guatemala are also traveling around the world on short-term missions trips. For example, between January and September 2005, 20,000 Koreans came on two-week short-term missions trips to Mongolia, typically in groups of 30-80 people at a time.³

The financial dollars spent on these short-term missions sojourns now outpaces what American Christians spend supporting the more traditional, long-term mission efforts of their churches and denominations. Hundreds of organizations have been started simply to organize and coordinate these trips. The short-term missionary movement is primarily a grassroots and populist phenomenon. Short-term mission work moves ahead in a way that it is almost completely divorced from scholarship, missiology, and seminary education. Most youth ministers are expected to lead groups of young people on these kinds of cross-cultural encounters but receive little, if any training, to do so.⁴

I am part of a small but growing research community that has been gathering data and assessing the efficacy of short-term missions.⁵ The motivation behind why many trips happen, the paternalistic interactions that often occur, and the growing amounts of money spent are reason for concern. Many studies raise questions about whether there is anything positive that results from these trips for the local communities that receive the missionaries. Some even question whether the trips are having the transformative impact upon the participants that they are alleged to have. It is impossible to fairly assess the efficacy of short-term missions without a framework from which to measure effectiveness. Given the objectives of this book, I have made evaluative judgments about short-term missions based upon the cultural intelligence framework and by analyzing whether the actual outcomes of short-term missions trips align with the outcomes espoused by short-term missions proponents.

To be fair, many of the same weaknesses found in short-term missions have been found in more traditional missionary efforts. And similar criticisms are levied against study abroad programs sponsored by higher educational institutions throughout the U.S. In fact, it is noteworthy that the growth in short-term missions activity among American Christians mirrors the rapid growth occurring in study abroad programs at universities across the U.S. Between 1985-2000, enrollment by American students in study abroad programs more than tripled. The dominant major of the students enrolled in these programs shifted from humanities and social sciences to more professionally oriented studies such as business and education.⁶ More comparative work is needed to look at the similarities and differences between educational short-term study abroad programs and religiously motivated short-term missions trips.

Researchers and practitioners from missiology assess that the most important research questions related to short-term missions lie in finding ways to ensure that these religious pilgrimages produce self-transformation among participants as well as bringing about positive change in the communities where they serve. The interdisciplinary, meta-model of cultural intelligence and its distinctive nature as a transformative model for cross-cultural interaction uniquely positions cultural intelligence as a lens through which to view short-term missions. In addition to providing a helpful framework for researching the effectiveness of short-term missions, cultural intelligence provides a research-based approach to developing more effective interventions to improve short-term missionary practice.

The rest of the chapter is organized in two primary sections—“Findings” and “Culturally Intelligent Mission”. The Findings section includes some key findings from existing research on the short-term missions phenomenon. The primary emphasis in this section examines key themes that emerged in studying the cross-cultural behavior and thinking among American short-term missionaries. The findings are presented in light of the concepts of cultural intelligence. The “Culturally Intelligent Mission” section looks more specifically at how the four factors of cultural intelligence come to bear on short-term missions work.

FINDINGS

In the relatively small body of research that exists on the phenomenon of short-term missions, most of the findings relate to three areas: the impact of these trips upon the participants themselves, the impact upon the locals who receive them, and the cross-cultural interaction that occurs between participants and locals. After making brief mention of the findings from the first two areas, the remainder of the section is devoted to looking at the cross-cultural behavior and thinking that occurs in these kinds of trips abroad.

Impact on Participants

Personal transformation is the number one reason most American Christians participate in short-term missions projects.⁷ Renewed spirituality, a commitment to resist materialism, and a newfound orientation toward service are all ways people describe the life-change they anticipate and experience from a short-term mission project.⁸ Some of the most often repeated comments made when asked to reflect upon one's brief, missional sojourn are:

"I was blown away. This was life changing!"

"I'll never be the same. I'm forever grateful."

"Those people are so happy. It makes me realize how happiness isn't about things."

Interestingly, these reflections are almost identical to the comments made by students who participate in non-religiously oriented, short-term study-abroad programs.⁹

Participants in both kinds of short-term experiences are flooded with powerful emotions and espouse to have undergone radical, personal transformation.

Mission trips are alleged to be the ideal vehicle to help American Christians identify their consumerist and ethnocentric values. The emphasis is upon nurturing spiritual transformation by volunteering in another cultural context for a few days.¹⁰

Robert Bland, director of an agency organized exclusively around sending teenagers on these global expeditions says, "We tell our people...we're building kids, not buildings. The purpose is...what [the locals] will do for us...[Building our kids] is the first purpose".¹¹

Investing billions of dollars in mission work that is *most* focused upon the transformation of the missionary is a radical shift from the missions movement throughout Christian history. While the transformation of the missionary has always been an acknowledged reality, it has always been considered secondary to serving the local community. Most mission paradigms throughout the ages have called for long-term sacrifice and service for the sake of others.¹²

A growing number of studies are questioning the efficacy of these trips in bringing about long-term personal transformation. Participants come home espousing they will buy less, pray more, and do much more community service at home. A few seminal studies suggest within 6-8 weeks, most participants resort back to all the same assumptions and behaviors they had prior to going on the trip.¹³

Some scholars are concerned that not only do these trips fail to bring about lasting life-change for the participants, worse yet, they actually perpetuate the very things they are intended to counter. Participants come home assuming poor people are doing just fine and are happy that way. Trip-goers come home concluding developing countries are backward given their chaotic road systems and archaic ways of doing construction. "Instead of advancing the cause...the exercise simply reinforces worn stereotypes and old power relations".¹⁴

At the very least, the effectiveness of these trips for fostering personal transformation among participants is not clear. Longitudinal studies are needed, both qualitative and quantitative, which examine the lasting effects of short-term missions trips upon the sojourners themselves. Given that cultural intelligence helps to examine an individual's personal values as well as the interconnection of cultural values, much can be gained by utilizing cultural intelligence to more fully understand the impact of these trips upon participants.

Impact on Locals

The other leading motivation for Christians to support and participate in short-term missions is the chance to voluntarily serve locals and the communities visited. Short-

term missions proponents advocate that missions has been snatched from the hands of professional, seminary-trained “experts” and given to everyday people sitting in the pew. Participants are excited about the chance to leave the everyday world of life at home to travel to a different place to share the Christian faith, build a building, or teach a workshop. The kinds of activities in which short-term mission groups engage are pretty diverse. Individuals and teams do everything from medical clinics to evangelistic meetings, drama and musical performances, and building homes and painting churches.

When short-term participants are seeking financial and prayer support, the benefit upon the recipients is the theme most strongly emphasized. Letters requesting financial donations frequently include statements like:

“Many of the people devastated by the Tsunami are not getting the help they need. We have a chance to rebuild the homes of the homeless in Sri Lanka.”

“Most of the Brazilian churches don’t have [church] buildings like we do. Our team is excited to build this [Brazilian] congregation a new building where they can meet.”

“This will be the first church building ever built in this city.”

These expectations are at the core of why high school students leave the comforts of suburban U.S.A. to mix cement for a week in Mexico. These assumptions may be why the giving to short-term missions now exceeds the giving to long-term missions. Many American Christians are convinced short-term missionaries positively influence local communities around the world.

While the life-changing impact of these trips upon the locals is used as a way to motivate people to support the trips, there has been little research conducted to confirm whether or not short-term missionaries are really making the impact they claim. Most of the reports about the positive impact upon the local communities come from North American participants and sponsoring organizations, not from the locals who have received and hosted the participants.

Those who have researched the impact of short-term missions upon the receivers are not convinced these trips are helping the recipients. One long-term missionary says, “Everyone knows that short-term missions benefit the people who come, not the people

here".¹⁵ In fact, many missionaries are concerned that the very nature of a short-term trip creates a band-aid approach to things that require more long-term solutions.

Kurt VerBeek, a sociologist living in Honduras, is one of the few researchers looking at the impact of short-term missions upon the local communities where they serve. One way VerBeek looked at this was by studying a North American relief organization's role in helping Hondurans rebuild their homes after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. The organization raised over \$2 million dollars for reconstruction of the 1.5 million homes lost and channeled it through Honduran partners. In turn, these partners hired Honduran builders to work with people to rebuild their homes. In addition, the organization mobilized 31 short-term teams from the U.S. and Canada to go down and assist in rebuilding homes. VerBeek was interested in whether there was a greater impact made upon the Honduran communities that received short-term groups as compared to those who just received the homes built by Honduran builders with North American money.

Through the data collected, VerBeek found no lasting impact, positive or negative, on the Honduran families and communities whose homes were built by North Americans as compared to those who never saw a short-term mission team. In fact, the Hondurans confided that if given the choice, they would rather see the money raised by each team who traveled to Honduras, channeled toward building 20 more homes and employing Hondurans. They acknowledged however, that the option of receiving the money in lieu of the missionaries was not likely a realistic option.¹⁶

More study is needed which examines the impact—positive, negative, or neutral—upon the local communities who receive short-term missionaries. This research must be informed by cultural intelligence as a way to get at the multi-dimensional issues at play. In addition, cultural intelligence is essential to the design and data collection of studies conducted among local communities. For example, many of the potential informants operate from cultural perspectives where "saving face" is highly valued. Consequently, creative, thoughtful methodology must be employed to get accurate data.

Cross-Cultural Behavior

I have been researching the phenomenon of short-term missions for the last eight years. Most of that research was qualitative in nature though always informed by the quantitative work of others. Using a grounded theory approach, data was collected and analyzed through pre-trip and post-trip interviews and journals of the American, short-term missionaries. In addition, the locals who hosted the groups provided feedback through evaluations and interviews. Focus-group methodology has also been employed. While the American participants typically assessed their trips as successful, most of the local perspectives challenged that perception. Looking across several of these studies, four key themes have continually emerged as characteristics of American short-term missionaries' cross-cultural practice. The following material briefly overviews those four themes and suggests the connection to cultural intelligence.

1. Ethnocentrism

The first recurring theme in the behavior of American short-term missionaries studied was ethnocentrism. Given the disparities between the American context and the communities visited, perhaps ethnocentrism is inevitable. For example, Americans spends more on trash bags annually than nearly half the world does on *all* goods. How can an American short-term missionary possible negotiate the chasm of difference created by a reality like that? The incongruities continue:

1 out of 3 American families own 3 cars versus 8 percent of people in the entire world own a car.

2 out of 3 Americans are considered overweight versus someone in the world dies of hunger every 16 seconds.

1 in 3700 American women die in childbirth versus 1 in 16 women in sub-Saharan Africa die in childbirth.

In the U.S. less than 1 in 100 children dies before age 5 versus 1 in 5 children dies before age 5 in much of the developing world.

4 in 5 American adults are high school graduates versus 1 in 4 children worldwide have to go to work everyday instead of school.

Americans consume 26 billion liters of *bottled* water annually versus 1 billion people are without safe drinking water.¹⁷

Career missionaries have often taken years to adjust to these kinds of differences between "home" and the "mission field". Two-week missionaries have little chance of

truly encountering what lies beneath these stark contrasts in their brief sojourns abroad. The point is not to feel shame for these disparities, though that was often the emotive response by American subjects. Instead, the interest was to see whether participants gained a growing awareness of the existing disparities and the cultural implications thereof. To a large degree, the missionaries were limited by having little more than a cursory understanding of cultural differences, hence the description of them as ethnocentric.

In addition, many short-term missionaries seemed to be unaware of how their American passports shaped locals' perceptions of them, regardless of their specific behavior. Some of the receiving communities used two metaphors to describe their predominant perception of Americans: "War" and "*Baywatch*"—the most watched American television program globally. While the group of short-term missionaries might vehemently oppose the war in Iraq and may have never watched a single episode of *Baywatch*, there seemed to be limited understanding that they were often viewed by locals in light of those realities.

Cultural intelligence is needed wherein short-term missionaries understand the interplay between cultural values in the place visited and those in one's own cultural context. Equally important is drawing upon cultural intelligence to better understand the stereotypes the locals may have of their guests, often times uninvited guests.

The ethnocentric behavior and thinking demonstrated by short-term missionaries was not significantly different from the typical behavior seen in American travelers as a whole. It was noteworthy however, that most of the short-term missionaries examined espoused strong apprehension about being ethnocentric and described their desire to behave in ways that would defy the "ugly American" image. However, the ensuing behavior and thinking demonstrated most of the individuals resorted back to the very kind of ethnocentrism they sought to avoid. Cultural intelligence helps get at the complexities involved in why that kind of discrepancy occurs between espoused perspectives and what is revealed in actual practice.

There is an additional layer of ethnocentrism that is unique to Western Christians. For the last two centuries, Christianity has been largely a "Western" religion. Back in 1800,

one percent of all Christians were thought to live outside the U.S. and Western Europe. By 1900, ten percent of all Christians were thought to live outside the U.S. and Western Europe. Today, more than two-thirds of the Christian Church lives outside North America and Western Europe. Christianity is growing rapidly, especially in places like Latin America, Southern Africa, and Southern India and China. In fact, none of the 50 largest Christian churches in the world are found in North America. Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea has more than 250,000 members, churches in Cote d'ivoire, Chile, and Columbia each have more than 150,000 members and the list continues a long way before getting to the largest church in the U.S.—Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas with about 25,000 members. Ethnocentrism led most short-term missionaries to work from the assumption that Christian churches outside the U.S. are inferior to U.S. churches in quality and quantity.¹⁸

One study measured short-term participants' ethnocentrism before they went on a trip and again when they returned. The study indicated participants' ethnocentrism was found to be significantly lower at the end of the trip than it was at the beginning. However, when tested more longitudinally, the lowered ethnocentrism was not sustained. Participants resorted back to their original ethnocentric perspectives.¹⁹ One researcher likens this to a sapling. If you bend it for a week, release it, and measure it there may be a perceived impact. But three months later the sapling may have no lingering results and be back in its original shape.²⁰

The cultural intelligence framework can result in the creative development of interventions to challenge the ethnocentrism of short-term missions participants. The most effective plans will employ use of these kinds of interventions before, during, and after the cross-cultural sojourns of short-term missionaries. The ubiquitous presence of ethnocentrism among short-term missionaries thwarts the transformative potential that exists in the altruistic intentions of the travelers. Given that cultural intelligence draws from multiple disciplines, it is uniquely suited to speak to the complexities of what goes on personally, socially, and missiologically in short-term missions.

2. Bounded Set Thinking

Ethnocentrism was further exacerbated by the missionaries “bounded-set thinking”—a

reasoning that simplifies things into either/or categories. For example, despite the profound differences that existed in the worlds encountered by most of the short term missionaries studied, almost every North American subject talked first about the similarities they observed rather than the differences. For example, one subject said, "I wish I had spent less time studying about the culture and the differences because I was really more struck by the similarities than the differences".

The tendency to look for similarities in an unfamiliar context is natural. Sociologists Ray and Anderson write,

When we travel to a new country, we feel an almost irresistible impulse to smooth over the strangeness, the distinct particularity of the people we meet. We slip seamlessly into supposing that they are just like ourselves, and we almost forget to marvel at the differences. It's not until we have dwelt in the new country long enough to be shocked, repeatedly, at the wrongness of our assumptions that we begin to notice the crucial things we have missed.²¹

As well as being a typical coping strategy for cross-cultural travelers, this tendency to look for common ground seemed to reflect an overall simplicity that occurs among short-term missionaries in describing their observations about their cross-cultural experiences.

This tendency to gloss over differences was related to the overall simplistic observations and interpretations that occurred among the short-term missionaries studied. The subjects' actions and reflections revealed they often assumed smiling, nodding, and silence meant the same things for all people. For example, North American ministers who went on short-term missions trips to train other ministers assumed they were teaching effectively because their local counterparts appeared captivated by the teaching and never left the room other than at formal break times. The local students however said things like, "I'm glad the teachers felt respected. They should. What they need to realize however, is that we would never think about talking or getting up to leave in the middle of their lecture. It would be repulsive to do that to a teacher in our culture."

There was little evidence that short-term missionaries were prepared to look below the artifacts of culture to explore the deeper values and assumptions at work. Part of this simplistic observation and interpretation seemed to be a result of placing complex issues into simple either/or categories.

Simplistic categories have been an ongoing part of the American ethos. Historically, an American is either Republican or Democrat, blue collar or white collar, liberal or conservative, modern or postmodern, and an environmentalist or industrialist. Postmodern thought has been eroding these categories for the last several years but either/or categories continue to permeate a great deal of American logic.

The foundationalist worldviews of the subjects studied further inclined them to operate in these kinds of either/or categories. Anthropologist Paul Hiebert²² refers to this kind of thinking as bounded-set logic. Bounded-set thinking, most typical among people of Western cultures, refers to drawing clear boundaries around those things believed to share intrinsic characteristics. For example, an apple may be red or green, it may be a variety of shapes and sizes, but everyone agrees it is an apple and not an orange. Bounded-set thinking defines an apple as such based upon its fitting within the boundaries that make something an “apple”. Things are identified based upon clear boundaries. The logical inference is that there can be no crossing of the boundary. Something cannot be partially an apple. It is either an apple or it is not. The bud and blossom that precede the tangible fruit are not considered “apples”.

In contrast, Hiebert identifies other cultures, which organize their cognitive thinking using centered-set logic. A centered set is not determined by its boundary, though it may have one. It is determined by its center. If the objects to be organized are moving towards the center they are considered to be in the set. In this case, anything moving toward becoming an apple, such as an apple bud or blossom, can easily be considered an apple, even though it looks nothing like the “boundaries” Westerners use to define an apple. Objects, which in some sense may be considered near the center but moving away from it, are seen to be outside the set. Thus, the boundary is determined by the relation of the objects to the center and not by essential characteristics of the objects themselves. A magnetic field is an example of a centered set, the pole being the center. Some particles are drawn towards the center and others repelled by it.

There are other cognitive sets identified by analysts but these two describe the difference in how cognitive processing shapes one’s cross-cultural practice. An example where this influences the thoughts and behaviors of short-term missionaries is when they try to determine whether someone is a Christian (which they often do). Using

bounded-set thinking, most American short-term missionaries have clear definitions of what makes someone a Christian as compared to what keeps someone out of that set. In contrast, many Eastern Christians are less concerned about identifying what boundaries characterize someone as being a Christian. Instead, the focus is upon the center so if someone is moving toward Jesus and the values he represents, that more clearly defines someone as a Christian rather than boundaries established around a prescribed set of doctrines or behaviors.

Much more needs to be explored about the implications of one's cognitive processing for how the individual behaves and relates cross-culturally. The anthropological and psychological underpinnings of cultural intelligence provide a helpful connection to this area. In particular, the meta-cognitive CQ dimension is particularly helpful in better understanding this finding.

3. The Money Factor

Few things are as complicated in cross-cultural interactions as the issues related to money and economics between different cultural groups. The disparity in income levels between short-term participants and locals, the power issues associated with giving money, and the tension of how to go back to "life at home" are all among the complexities associated with money and short-term missions. In particular, the behavior and conversation of short-term participants varies between charitable sympathies for the poverty of those they encounter versus seeing the locals as quite happy without the "trappings" of materialistic gain. Both ends of this continuum are complex and require a heightened degree of cultural intelligence. Each is explored briefly in what follows:

The 'Power' of Generosity

Most short-term missionaries travel to places where they face the issue of poverty head-on. The predominant topic of conversation as short-term missionaries describe their experiences is the issue of poverty. The participants feel sympathetic toward what appears to be sub-standard living situations and talk about the desire to see something done to give people a better quality of life. The participants frequently talk about how blessed they are to have been born in the U.S. and cannot imagine what it would have been like to be born as an Ethiopian.

Educational researcher Terrence Linhart describes the challenges faced by high school students when encountering poverty on their short-term missions journeys. He quotes an 18-year-old, short-term missionary who looked out a window overlooking a town in Ecuador who said, "It's just amazing the poverty. Like, it breaks my heart, but it makes me feel so spoiled and, like, I'm such an evil person".²³ Another student said, "Living in America is a blessing and a curse at the same time. There's a blessing because you have all this stuff, but all the stuff is a curse, you know?"²⁴

While many Ethiopians and others across the continent of Africa *are* living in destitute conditions, not all Africans are sitting back waiting to be rescued by heroic short-term missionaries (or Hollywood stars for that matter). In fact, more than 90 percent of Africans surveyed by a recent BBC pool said they are proud to be African.²⁵ While the poverty, illiteracy, and disease throughout Africa is devastating, Africa is also a place where many people are thriving. Democracy has begun to take hold in many of its nations and Africans are grappling with answers to their own problems.

Amidst the good intentions of short-term missionaries to give generously of their time and money, many recipients, while grateful for the generosity, also describe feeling dehumanized. One Ugandan church leader said it this way, "We did not know we were poor until someone from the outside told us".²⁶

Furthermore, the complexities of what these trips do to the local economies of the places visited are significant. Organizers often defend these trips saying they support the local economies by the shopping and eating done by the visiting missionaries. However, building projects are often done in ways that take away employment from local builders.

Jo Ann VanEngen, a long-term missionary living in Honduras contends,

Short-term mission groups almost always do work that could be done (and usually done better) by people of the country they visit. The spring break group spent their time and money painting and cleaning the orphanage in Honduras. That money could have paid two Honduran painters who desperately needed the work, with enough left over to hire four new teachers, build a new dormitory, and provide each child with new clothes.²⁷

With 40 percent of the world living on \$1-\$2/daily while most short-term missionaries live on at least \$70/day, there are resources short-term missionaries should consider sharing

generously. At the same time, the local communities where they visit have abundant wealth of a different kind. In the spirit of mutuality, short-term teams need to learn to give in ways that do not perpetuate the tired power structures of colonialism while also learning to receive from the plenty that exists in the communities they visit. A generous spirit is a worthy outcome from these kinds of activities. It simply needs to be held in tension with the de-humanizing impact that can result from charitable giving done without cultural intelligence.

Perceived Happiness

Ironically, there is no evidence that encountering poverty on a short-term missions trip provides lasting results upon participants' philanthropic giving or upon how they personally spend money once they return home. On one hand, short-term missionaries might be too quick to view locals in a de-humanized way by seeing them in light of their poverty and living conditions. On the other hand, due to limited cultural intelligence, short-term participants often conclude locals in the developing world are quite happy the way they are. The most frequent statement made from hundreds of short-term missionaries interviewed was "They're so happy!" The assumption was, despite having little material wealth, they are quite content the way they are.

Again, seeing one's contentment apart from abundant resources can be a transformative experience for those of living in the developed world. However, it might as easily be that the missionaries are inaccurately interpreting the smiles they encounter when interacting with the locals. When the subjects were asked why they concluded people were happy, the responses were, "I could tell by their smiles" or "They were laughing a lot when we were together." Due to limited cultural intelligence, the missionaries were unable to suspend judgment and seek out whether the smiles were an indication of happiness and contentment or whether they were simply a nervous or socially appropriate response to a group of foreigners.

More troubling is that as a result of the conclusion, "They're so happy", many short-term missionaries return home pacified that people in the developing world do not need the distractions of money and goods. So instead of nurturing generosity, mutuality, and creative strategies for enhancing resource development in under-resourced regions, the trip can actually mitigate against those very ideals.

Organizers of short-term missions trips often resist these findings. "Should we get participants to respond to poverty or not? Which is it?!" That kind of question stems from the previously cited bounded-set logic that brings about resistance to the complexities of these kinds of economic issues. Short-term missionaries must resist "saving the world" mentalities while also being on guard against indifference toward the living conditions of the locals they encounter cross-culturally. Much more needs to be studied to understand how inexperienced, uneducated (as it relates to development and economics) short-term missionaries can and should interact with local communities.

4. Category Width

The literature describing the cross-cultural behavior of business professionals, study abroad students, and military personnel cites similar themes as the findings described here. However, an additional theme that is directly related to short-term missionary work is the way the missionary views morality and specifically, the way he or she views the teachings of Jesus and the Bible.

Admittedly, Christianity, at its core is a foundationalist worldview, which predisposes its adherents to espouse universal truths that apply regardless of cultural variance. There is wide agreement among Christians worldwide, that there are some defined categories of right versus wrong. Many other faiths also affirm absolutist perspectives. A foundationalist perspective claims that local culture is not given complete liberty or authority to define and construct morality to be whatever it wants. Foundationalists hold there are some universal issues of morality that apply regardless of culture. For example, the Christian sees the abuse of wealth and power as wrong, not simply a cultural way of approaching things. Christianity is opposed to women being dehumanized by men, governments, and religions in cultures. It holds that it is not simply the option of a culture to socially construct a moral code that allows for these kinds of oppressive practices. Instead, Christians believe that the moral code taught and characterized by Christ and the Bible supersedes cultural notions of morality.

American short-term missionaries often combine their foundationalist perspectives with

bounded-set thinking. As a result, the short-term missionaries embrace clear categories of right versus wrong and leave little room for things, which are just different. The work of Pettigrew and Detwiler²⁸ on “Category Width” is a helpful way of viewing the narrow space most American Christians give the category of difference. The subjects studied tended to be narrow categorizers (see the top diagram in figure 1) and as a result, placed most issues into categories of right versus wrong with a very small category for things that are simply different. Short-term training programs should explore how to help participants widen their categories of difference (See the bottom diagram in figure 1) while still respecting their personal convictions of right versus wrong.



Figure 1: Category Width²⁹

Further, there was limited awareness among the American subjects of how significantly culture shapes the way one reads the Bible and hence views morality. Most missed out on the rich hermeneutical treasure that exists in encountering fellow Christians in another part of the world who hold to some similar presuppositions of Jesus’ moral teaching but often interpret its application in very different ways.

In the study that looked at North American ministers who went on short-term missions trips to train ministers in other parts of the world, the American pastors kept talking about the importance of teaching only biblical principles.³⁰ In their minds, as long as they exclusively taught principles rather than describing specific programs in their churches, the teaching would be transcultural. Subjects frequently said things like, “We teach timeless, transferable principles therefore our biblical teaching applies worldwide, whatever the context.” There was limited cultural intelligence evident in that the American pastors failed to see the ways the principles they taught were embedded in cultural narratives.

More study is needed that explores how to help foundationalists live in the tension of universal morals alongside the notion that knowledge is socially constructed. A conceptual framework, which combines a constructive foundationalism like Schon's, with cultural intelligence could yield some important findings for Christian mission work.

Schon writes:

A constructionist point of view need not lead to relativism and the abandonment of every claim to knowledge. . . . The advantage of the constructionist point of view is that it fits our experience of mutual understanding, helps make sense of the fact that, often, the more we work at trying to understand one another, the more profoundly we experience the differences among our ways of seeing things. And the image of frame-reflective entry into one another's worlds suggests the experience we have (much less often) of passing from misunderstanding to mutual understanding.³¹

These four themes—ethnocentrism, bounded-set thinking, the money factor, and category width—were the most consistent variables found in examining the cross-cultural behavior and thinking among short-term missionaries. The qualitative design utilized allowed for rich, thick description of what was occurring in these brief, missional sojourns. While sample sizes were often limited, cross-examining these findings with a growing number of other qualitative and quantitative studies exploring short-term missions work further validates the findings. In addition, much of the literature regarding service learning and study abroad initiatives further supports the findings of this study.

CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT MISSIONS

As described throughout the preceding findings, the cultural intelligence framework is uniquely suited to addressing future research and resulting effectiveness of short-term missions. This final section will more specifically address the relevance of the four factors of cultural intelligence to short-term missions study and practice. Many of these implications are also germane to short-term study abroad programs employed by colleges and universities.

Cognitive CQ

Cognitive CQ, the measurement of one's understanding about cross-cultural issues and differences, is the dimension of cultural intelligence emphasized most in short-term missions preparation. Many short-term missions initiatives include some cross-cultural training before the trip. The pre-departure training usually emphasizes a brief history

about the destination and some culturally-specific behaviors of which participants should be mindful.

Upon encountering the culture, participants typically disregarded the information they received beforehand. In the face of dissonance, they resorted to values and behaviors that were most comfortable and familiar.

Furthermore, some of the locals who received the short-term missionaries expressed concern that pre-trip training gave the missionaries just enough cultural knowledge to make them “dangerous”. Local subjects recounted illustrations of missionaries who acted like experts about the local region because of having been through some pre-trip training.

Research related to cultural intelligence accounts for the potential danger of pre-departure training by demonstrating the limitations of addressing one factor of cultural intelligence without the other three factors. The four factors of cultural intelligence interact symbiotically together. With that in mind, the ideal situation is a short-term missionary who *does* go through pre-departure training. That training is most effective when it combines all four factors of cultural intelligence.

Many missions mishaps could be avoided or at least mitigated if short-term missionaries simply learned more about cultural values in general and how those play out in the local destination they will visit. In addition, cognitive preparation should include individuals understanding how those values compare with what they as individuals value—both as a result of their own home culture and as a result of their personal disposition. Adaptive use of the cultural intelligence instruments developed by Van Dine and Ang³² have great potential for helping prepare short-term missionaries in this regard.

In addition, short-term missionaries should avoid looking at Cognitive CQ as an isolated body of information to master before an upcoming trip. Instead, cognitive development in cultural intelligence should move the individual forward in the lifelong journey of cross-cultural understanding. The upcoming trip, given its hands-on nature, is an ideal way to enhance one’s cognitive CQ, particularly when put together with the other elements of cultural intelligence. When combined with training—both formal and informal—short-term

missions sojourns have the potential to help participants become constructive global citizens. By tapping into some of the suggestions included in the section which follows, short-term missions experiences can become meaningful ways to help individuals reflect more broadly on how culture in general shapes people's perceptions of the world.

Meta-Cognitive CQ

The area of cultural intelligence that appeared most absent in the experiences of American short-term missionaries is meta-cognitive CQ. More often than not, participants engaged in conversations and observed situations without demonstrating an understanding that a different cultural script was at work behind the behavior and circumstances.

Whether it was the inability to see their ethnocentrism, the surface level observations, or the simplistic tendencies apparent in the ways they talked about economics, short-term missionaries did not demonstrate an ongoing awareness of cultural surroundings and social cues. They remained on auto-pilot and interpreted events in the same ways they would have if they saw those same things in their home cultures.

There is a great deal to be gained by looking for connections between transformative, experiential learning theories and meta-cognitive CQ. The potential of these connections goes far beyond short-term missions. Some preliminary work has been done exploring the relationship between Kolb's model of experiential learning and cultural intelligence.³³ Additional work has been started which views the connections between Laura Joplin's³⁴ five-stage model of experiential learning, a model based largely upon Kolb's work, and cultural intelligence. A small group of researchers recently convened exemplars of effective short-term missions practice to conduct focus group research. Joplin's model and cultural intelligence were the theoretical frameworks, which guided the data collection.

Joplin's³⁵ model, adapted by Linhart³⁶ for short-term missions trips is³⁷:

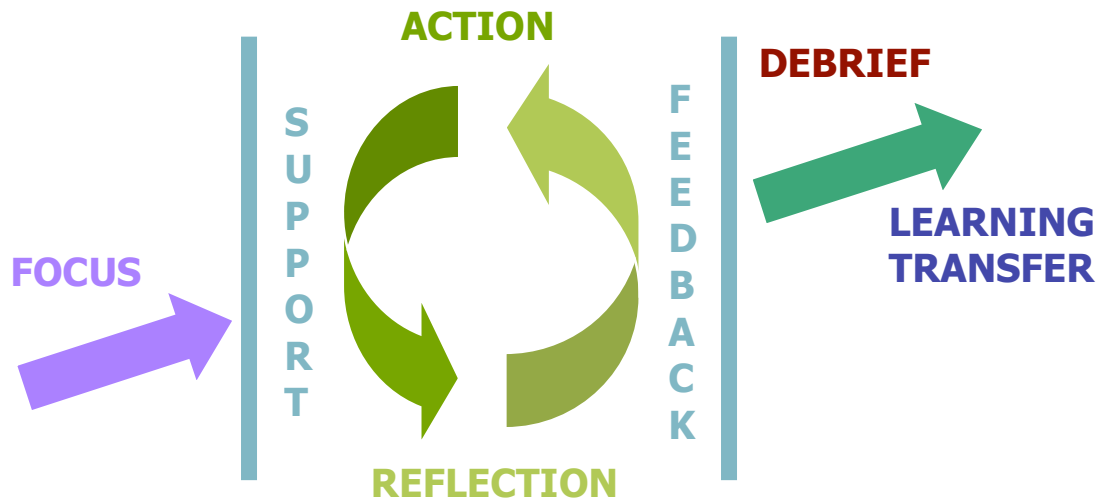


Figure 2 – The Joplin³⁸ model, modified by Linhart³⁹.

Stage One: FOCUS

An important starting point for enhancing the transformative nature of cross-cultural pilgrimages lies in helping participants focus on the experience and the challenging actions they will experience. Preparation and planning are consistent themes in Joplin's model and in the meta-cognitive factor of cultural intelligence. The focus stage is designed toward helping participants anticipate areas where they need to be aware.

Stage Two: ACTION-REFLECTION

The main component in nurturing metacognitive CQ during the trip is the action—reflection process. In this ongoing cycle, participants are placed in a situation in which they are purposefully stretched. The action is a chance to engage with familiar skills in an unfamiliar environment.

While most short-term missions trips inevitably include these sorts of activities, many lack the reflection needed to help participants maximize their growth. Conscious or not, participants are constantly making meaning out of their actions. They are continually engaged in a highly personal, ongoing “conversation” in their own minds about who they are in relation to what they are encountering. Since this is generally internal, participants may draw conclusions from their experiences that do not reflect reality.

The constant barrage of experiences on a typical short-term missions experience come at participants so quickly that they resemble the experience of walking through a museum and experiencing entire civilizations in a single hallway. As a result, participants have difficulty finding time to make sense of their experiences. Facilitators are needed who can come alongside participants in the midst of the provocative encounters that occur in these cross-cultural encounters. Facilitators need to ask questions that help participants decipher the meaning behind what they experience.

Stage Three: SUPPORT-FEEDBACK

To facilitate the action--reflection cycle, Joplin recommends surrounding the discussions and experiences with walls of support and feedback. The support usually comes from other members in the experience, such as other participants, trip leaders, and locals from within the communities being visited. However, support can also include the encouragement that comes from supportive relational networks at home. Research shows a strong correlation between an individual's success in a cross-cultural experience and the emotional and tangible support they have from friends and family.

According to exemplars gathered in the focus-group study, most trip facilitators overlook the importance of high quality, ongoing feedback. As the action and reflection cycle continues throughout the learning process, the facilitators must intervene with participants and help them talk about their reflections – the meanings participants are creating from their experiences. Many groups share daily in small “debriefing” times, but the size of the group and the limited time often limit feedback to simply reviewing the activities of the day rather than effectively directing reflection that stimulates transformation.

Because cross-cultural encounters often bring about so many new experiences in a short, rapid amount of time, participants often feel pressure to label or make sense of each moment too quickly. In doing so, they resort to the kinds of things described in the findings section above.

Stage Four: DEBRIEF

When the action component is completed, participants begin the process of leaving and enter into a stage described as the “debrief”. Different from the reflection process, Joplin describes the debrief stage as the organized process of identifying learning that happened, discussing it with others, and evaluating it. This debrief process can be done individually but is most effectively done with others. The most helpful debriefs often include a rereading of pre and during-trip journals where each day’s reflections have been recorded.

Stage Five: LEARNING TRANSFER

The final stage of Joplin’s model of experiential learning is “Learning Transfer”. Most short-term missions participants invest little time in transferring the learning from their cross-cultural sojourn. Two realities fight against effective learning transfer. First, most of the significant learning on a short-term trip takes place in an environment very different from the home communities of participants. Second, the participants themselves do not know how to transfer the learning to their own lives.

The exemplars overall emphasized the importance of weaving short-term missions into the year-round life of the parish and individual. This correlates positively with the cultural intelligence literature that refers to cultural intelligence as a malleable, ongoing growth process.

Much more needs to be examined about the connections between metacognitive CQ and short-term missions work. There is an obvious interdependence between cognitive and meta-cognitive CQ which has led many researchers and writers to refer to these two factors almost synonymously. Given that meta-cognitive CQ is so blatantly absent in the practices of short-term missionaries, there is a value in continuing to isolate meta-cognitive CQ in order to bring the needed interventions to enhance the effectiveness of short-term missionary practice. In helping short-term missionaries more carefully view what is really going on below the surface within themselves as well as in the external environments they encounter, the participants can reach across the chasm of cultural difference in ways that reflect mutuality and dignity.

Motivational CQ

Cognitive and Meta-Cognitive CQ cannot be sustained without continual motivation to be culturally adaptive. Short-term missionaries typically manifest little desire to slog through the complex cultural differences that exist in the communities they visit. Admittedly, the brief duration of the short-term trip makes it difficult to engage in a highly motivated sense of adapting to the local context. It is hard to even experience much of the cross-cultural conflict and dissonance that occurs during a week or two in a new context much less to have to persevere through it.

More research is needed which examines the relevance of motivational CQ to brief cross-cultural sojourns. Though the issues related to perseverance and culture shock are different for expatriates and missionaries in long-term assignments, there are motivational dynamics at play for those who engage in brief cross-cultural sojourns too. The tasks done by short-term missionaries include things like teaching, constructing buildings, and running medical clinics. Participants appear highly motivated to perform those tasks well. However, the motivation to acculturate well beyond the immediate task was abysmal. Participants rarely saw the need to immerse themselves in eating local foods or learning about local customs. In their minds, "We're headed home in another week so it's better to stay healthy by eating familiar foods, getting a good night of rest, and keeping focused on our real task here." Regretfully, even the effectiveness of the tasks completed was limited because of inadequate motivation to acculturate more fully during the brief sojourns.

Participants often reported profound, affect-laden experiences of confusion and resistance to some local cultural rituals while others described a strong sense of connection and were deeply moved by their experiences. Even during these brief encounters, some profound affective experiences occurred, which clearly overshadowed the more cognitive outcomes. Much more needs to be explored to understand the emotional and affective dimensions of these kinds of short-term experiences. Cultural intelligence combined with literature from the field of psychodynamic cultural psychology⁴⁰ could yield access to hidden aspects of how these experiences affect the construction of one's self. In addition, more correlation needs to be done between the literature on culture shock and the affective, motivational dynamics that result from cultural differences upon short-term missionaries.

Behavioral CQ

Most of the findings reported in this chapter reflect the behavioral CQ of short-term missionaries. One of the most helpful ways to expose short-term missions practitioners to see the need for cultural intelligence is through a description of the behavior represented by the existing studies. Coordinators of these trips need to be cautioned however, against placing primary energy toward intervening in the behavior aspect itself. Clearly there are some appropriate behaviors that need to be learned to avoid offending the locals encountered. However, far more effective in altering one's behavioral CQ in these kinds of trips is to give attention to the other three dimensions of cultural intelligence.

Behavioral CQ is not unimportant however. Ultimately, short-term missionaries will be judged by locals based upon the behaviors they exhibit. But as indicated in the other areas, rather than merely learning behavior modification strategies to get by for ten days in another culture, participants would be well served by strategies which help them develop a repertoire of behaviors from which to draw whenever they encounter someone from another culture. This is a distinctive advantage of the cultural intelligence framework over many other cross-cultural competency theories which lean toward behavior modification rather than truly nurturing transformation.

As the world becomes increasingly multicultural, culturally intelligent behavior is an essential skill as much and more in the short-term missionary's hometown and work place as it is on a two week sojourn abroad. Studies and training need to be developed to help missionaries discern when it is appropriate to adapt to the behaviors of locals and when it is inappropriate to do so. Increasingly, short-term missionaries need to move from merely navigating different cultural behaviors to actually becoming more multicultural individuals. As compared to the theories of cross-cultural competency that depend upon cognitive information to transform behavior, cultural intelligence is uniquely suited to serve American Christians. Cultural intelligence is a more authentic, transformative approach to interacting with human beings from various cultures in mutually enriching ways than cross-cultural models that seek to adjust one's behavior simply to accomplish an outside agenda—whether the agenda is selling coffee or Jesus.

While most of the findings reported have emphasized the cross-cultural behavior and thinking of the American short-term missionaries, much needs to be done to view the cross-cultural behavior and thinking of the locals who receive these missionaries. Cultural intelligence is needed on both sides of the cultural chasm. However, as the guests in local communities, the onus is upon the short-term missionaries to take the initiative to grow in cultural intelligence.

Conclusion

Just as transcontinental travel among business professionals is no longer exclusively done by senior-level executives, so also, transcontinental mission work is no longer reserved for those traditionally referred to as “missionaries”. Lay people, old and young, are traversing the planet on spiritual pilgrimages where sacred goals are pursued, normal structures are dissolved, and personal transformation is assumed. This transformation ideally produces new selves to be reintegrated back into everyday life at home, while also intended to serve and help others in distant places. “That is, they aim not only for self-transformation, but for change in the places to which they go.”⁴¹

More research is needed which examines short-term missions in light of cultural intelligence. Additionally, interventions and assessments drawing upon cultural intelligence need to be developed and further refined for use by short-term missionaries. In so doing, short-term missions trips have the potential of being mutually beneficial experiences for the participants and for the local communities who receive them.

The increased presence of cross-cultural service and mission as a result of globalization is something fraught with potential. Rather than simply objectifying people in other parts of the world as potential markets for goods, services, or religion, short-term missions done with cultural intelligence can be a vehicle for great good in the world. Cultural intelligence provides a way forward to help direct the growing phenomenon of short-term missions toward truly exercising kindness as the highest form of wisdom.



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¹ The term "American" is used in this chapter in its popularized form, that is referring to individuals from the United States. Out of respect for the many other countries that exist in the Americas, I've resisted using the term "America" to refer to the country of the U.S.

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