

The Challenges and Blessings of Working on Multi-Cultural Teams

We served on an international missions team in Cambodia for ten years. On this team were 65 missionaries from 20 different sending countries, the majority from Asia. This workshop is about the challenges, the blessings, and the beauty of seeking to do missions in unity and diversity.

Preparing for missions, we often think about crossing cultures, learning a language, and adapting to the host culture. What I didn't think about is crossing cultures with my own teammates. My first small team in Cambodia had five cultures represented by six people! Global Christianity is wonderfully diverse, and our mission teams are also becoming diverse. This diversity brings unique challenges and opportunities.

Terms like diversity, multi-cultural, and cross-cultural are buzzwords. People generally think diversity is a good thing. What do we mean when we talk about terms like multi-cultural, cross-cultural, or intercultural? The rhetoric has shifted in the US from the idea of "melting pot" to "salad bowl." In the old terminology, "multi-cultural" meant all cultures coming together to form a new culture. In the new terminology, "multi-cultural" means cultures come together and enhance one another but don't change. What view of multiculturalism is correct? There is nuance in understanding these terms. An intercultural team seeks to be a community where there is deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural teams also go one step further. Intercultural teams are open to a measure of being changed by one another. We will discuss an example of an intercultural team, the initial challenges, and how the team came together.

The challenges of intercultural teams generally fall into two categories: cultural misunderstanding and "hidden hierarchies". We will discuss examples of both cultural misunderstanding and the minority experience.

With all the challenges, are intercultural teams worth it? The Biblical witness supports the idea. The thread of "nations" Scripturally shows us who we will be. There is also the rising example of intercultural mission teams in Acts.

In Cambodia, the blessings that came from serving on an intercultural team were worth the misunderstandings. Intercultural teams are a taste of who we will be (Rev. 7), and a powerful witness to the world (John 17). Additionally, it is a blessing to learn from one another cross-culturally. In our own cultural setting, we tend to have cultural blinders. Christians from around the world help us see Scripture and its applications more deeply.

Voices on engagement include the importance of listening to and valuing minority voices. Practical ways to engage include listening, lamenting, & laughing. Being kind throughout language and cultural learning processes is also important; it takes courage to communicate cross-culturally.

In application, we consider two case studies of intercultural teams from a member care perspective.

Resources

Hawthorne, Steven, Winter, Ralph, ed., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009.

O'Donnell, Kelly, ed., *Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices from Around the World*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002.

Pei, Adrian, *The Minority Experience*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2018.

Rah, Soong-Chan, *Many Colors*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.

Workshop Resources Google Drive Link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1P-b_fYHVtAd2cvAKk4Qs35Kp0c7mBG4i?usp=share_link

- Intercultural Teams PPT
- Hints Interculturally Friendly Events
- Interculturally Friendliness Explainer
- Mission Round Table: Race, Ethnicity, Bible, and Mission



MC2 - Google Drive

drive.google.com