



The Christian Effectiveness Model

Is measurement possible?

EM3 Effectiveness Models series

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The following item forms Part 2 of the ten-part manual. It assumes some familiarity with the model. It may therefore be helpful to check first articles EM1 and EM2 on this web-site, although the outline below should provide sufficient background for what follows.

Outline

The Christian Effectiveness Model is designed to help any Christian mission agency assess and improve its effectiveness in ministry. The exercise is more than just a general audit.

It focuses on a set of 48 questions to be answered. This process produces a 'measure' of effectiveness through a scoring system, although the main benefits come from asking the questions themselves and listing the issues that arise from them. This work is undertaken by an 'Assessment Group'.

The meaning of the term 'effectiveness' is broken into four parts. The fundamental meaning is the achievement of planned or desired results labelled **ACHIEVEMENT** in the model.

But these results need to be subservient to God's will – so the model introduces the concept of **VALIDITY**.

As Effectiveness is about doing the right things to achieve the results, there is also the idea of **CHOICE**.

Finally, effectiveness is concerned with the lesser ideas of both efficiency (minimising wasted effort) and quality (doing things well from the viewpoints of all interested parties) – hence the idea of **EXCELLENCE**.

These four 'themes', in the order **VALIDITY, CHOICE, EXCELLENCE, ACHIEVEMENT** are allocated 12 questions each. Each question is then given five sample tests to show how it may be scored.

The model applies to all types of 'Christian mission agency' defined as 'any organisation whose primary aim is to serve Jesus Christ and his Church in a given field of Christian ministry'.

The model uses a number of organisational and planning terms, but these are merely shorthand labels for various concepts. Any organisation can amend these to suit its usual terminology.

This article now focuses on the issue of creating a measure for 'effectiveness', and on how the model seeks to counter some difficulties.

How can you measure effectiveness?

It is immediately apparent that any assessment of 'effectiveness' is no straightforward task. Here are four problems that might block the way.

First, the model seeks to encompass a wide range of agencies. These include evangelistic missions, Bible and theological colleges, commercial enterprises (such as publishers), and those who provide a professional service for a fee. It is also designed for use not only by the whole organisation, but also by individual departments within it. Can one model apply to such a broad band?

Secondly, the model deals with not just a physical product provided through a tightly controlled work environment (as in much of commerce or industry). More often it has to cope with a service provided through an organisation where gift income, rather than the discipline of sales, provides viability and where volunteers play a significant role. Can one measure with any accuracy when accountability structures are so weak?

Thirdly, the purpose of the model is not simply to assess 'efficiency' (whether things are being done in the best possible way), but the prior concept of whether the right things are being done. It also goes beyond current and widespread interest in the idea of 'excellence' even though this is a part of it. How can one measure or assess such an open-ended concept?

Fourthly, the model assumes that, for a Christian mission agency, those 'right things' (within the definition of effectiveness) are determined by God himself, and that success must therefore be on his terms, not ours. This introduces the concept of divine plan and guidance. How can one assess whether an agency is within God's will? It is not even as straightforward as for a local church where there are clearer scriptural principles to follow. And what do we mean by success? Even a seemingly 'successful' enterprise may not in fact be an 'effective' one in God's eyes and vice versa.

We now look at these four objections in turn.

The breadth of application

The model has been designed for a wide range of Christian organisations. At its heart is the concept of a mission agency serving people outside the UK Church through direct evangelism, caring services, development work or training. But it is also intended for home missions, Bible and theological colleges,

denominational offices and a range of agencies that service the Church in some way.

To enable the model to fit all these different cases, two areas of user-control are assumed. First, the questions need to be read into the specific situation of the organisation under investigation and adapted as necessary. Secondly, the findings need to be interpreted with care.

The first point was helpfully demonstrated when the model was being tested. One organisation, a resource and umbrella agency for a range of mission agencies, noted that its beneficiaries, its financial supporters and the source of its governance were one and the same group: the mission agencies themselves. This was an extreme scenario, and yet the model proved itself easily adaptable to fit this case. A few of the questions had to be viewed with this in mind, and one or two others were combined.

A more common occurrence will be when the beneficiary is the UK Church. One of the questions that relates to the Church (A7 – *these references relate to the 48 questions listed in EM2*) and its neighbour that relates to the (normally non-church) society in which the agency works (A8) need to be combined. Another (V4), that considers the world, needs to be applied instead to the Church. The model and its scoring allow for this.

Other differences may be between a faith-mission and a Christian agency offering consultancy advice to churches. These may use very different types of language to describe how they go about their work, but as already explained, the model's language is only an expression of deeper meaning. Provided this is noted there should be no problem.

Secondly, the model's findings need to be interpreted with care. For this reason the Assessment Group that works through the questions should contain at least one person outside the organisation, possibly a specialist adviser of some kind. He or she will need to help the group see what particular answers to certain questions may mean.

For example, one of the questions on validity asks if an organisation is highly regarded by other Christian leaders. A negative answer here does not in itself mean that there is no valid ministry. On the contrary, some great works of God have only been carried out in the teeth of strong opposition from other Christians. So, with this test, it may be necessary to look at which leaders

are critical and why – and then consider what this means.

There is a slight risk of lack of discipline in interpretation so that poor findings are dismissed. But again, the make-up of the Assessment Group which undertakes the analysis should be chosen to cover a range of stakeholders: board, CEO, staff, users, supporters. This is designed to minimise this danger.

Summary

The model is flexible enough to cope with a wide range of applications for the following reasons.

- Its question format is less prescriptive than a statement format.
- The scoring system allows for questions to be combined or ignored.
- The sample tests given to help answer each question are clearly shown as samples which can be ignored or amended to fit different organisations.
- The Assessment Group includes both an external adviser and a wide range of stakeholders so that interpretation of questions and replies can be as objective as possible.

Accountability without market forces

A manufacturing or retail industry will be effective if it manages resources and sells products at such prices that investors and workers are paid and the company makes sufficient profits to develop the business. It is possible to be ineffective and survive if a gullible public are prepared to pay a higher price than they need to. But a competitive and changing market-place will often force such an organisation to work towards greater efficiency and greater effectiveness too.

Many Christian mission agencies, however, depend upon the motivation of supporters (through giving money and time) to enable the work to go ahead. Providing enough people believe in the cause and offer support, a highly ineffective and/or inefficient work can continue unchecked, especially for a long-established work in a rapidly changing culture. The organisation's continued existence may not depend so much on customer response as on supporter enthusiasm. In fact some Christians argue that when beneficiaries vote with their feet and ignore or even oppose the service being offered, this may be a sign that the agency has got it right!

Again, there is often little accountability outside the agency other than what is required by

agencies such as the Charity Commission and Inland Revenue. Any Christian can start an organisation to do almost anything without any form of external regulation apart from ensuring that it is keeping within charity and other legislation. The board will usually be self-selecting. There can be little enforceable accountability to the Church in any meaningful way. It is this lack of accountability that makes any rigorous assessment of effectiveness, for them, so easy to avoid and, for us outside, so difficult to apply.

To give one example, a Christian organisation may exploit its staff, paying too little, expecting too much and/or placing them in positions of unacceptable danger. This may be justified on a selective reading of biblical texts on servanthood, or through a misuse of power.

Summary

This is a genuine difficulty which has to be taken seriously. The model therefore has the following features.

- A number of the questions focus on the views of people outside the organisation itself: eg. those to whom it is accountable (V11), respected Christian leaders (V12); the beneficiaries (A5, A6), the Church (A7), and the society in which the organisation operates (A8).
- Sample tests for several other questions assume external input too.
- The research phase involves obtaining the views of groups such as staff, volunteers and independent advisers. Provided the research is carried out as recommended, honest views should be discovered.
- The questions on *Achievement* mean that it would be difficult for any organisation to hide behind a smoke-screen of purposeless activity as the questions test results against plans.

Effectiveness not just excellence

We live today in a management culture that seeks to define and identify standards of excellence. Quality systems such as 'Investors in People' and social auditing provide benchmarks for companies to demonstrate a superior level of quality.

In the past few years the (secular) voluntary sector in the UK has been looking closely at such standards to assess whether they apply to their work as well. Some of these have been taken on board by voluntary organisations (and a growing number of Christian mission agencies too). These are:

- Investors in People
- ISO 9000
- PQASSO (the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)
- The Business Excellence model
- People in Aid (for overseas aid agencies).

The Excellence Model (from the European Foundation for Quality Management - EFGM) has been reworked for the voluntary sector. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) published a form of this in May 2000 and some of its ideas have influenced thinking on the Christian Effectiveness Model.

However, these models do not go far enough in addressing issues of validity within our thinking on effectiveness and, naturally, take no account of issues of the Kingdom of God. The concept of excellence is not as wide as the concept of effectiveness. It is quite possible to run an organisation in an excellent way, but not to be doing the right thing in God's plan in the first place.

The CEM therefore incorporates ideas from the secular use of quality measurement, but has to build on a new foundation. It cannot be simply a variation on a system already in existence as its underlying purpose is wider and assumptions in the Christian context are radically different from all secular thinking. It is quite valid for a Christian mission agency to seek accreditation with 'Investors in People', or similar organisations, but the CEM is seeking to measure more than quality.

Summary

The following features of the model take it beyond a normal quality assessment tool.

- The four underlying themes (Validity, Choice, Excellence and Achievement) are given equal weight in the model. This means that the area of investigation is considerably wider than the scope of quality assessment tools.
- The Validity theme assumes the will of God, and everything else follows from this. This is not an adaptation of any other tool. The whole model is placed in a Christian context which strongly influences every part of it.
- The model is expressed in terms of questions rather than formulae. This open approach is not only more theologically appropriate, but better able to cope with the open-ended nature of effectiveness.
- One of the most valuable outputs is proving to be the issues raised from the process of answering the questions. The process of applying the model fits the nature of the concept of effectiveness.

Success on God's terms

A proper understanding of 'success' in Christian ministry deserves more space than is possible here. See, for example, 'Success – a biblical exploration' by Simon Coupland (Grove Books S81). Without clear thinking on biblical principles there is a great danger of adopting the kind of arguments used by those who promote the 'prosperity gospel'.

In the field under consideration note that:

- 1 A 'successful' ministry (in terms of humanly perceived results) does not necessarily imply that this is a valid ministry in God's sight.
- 2 A 'financially viable' ministry does not imply such validity either.
- 3 Nor does one that has run for many years, clearly with God's blessing, imply that this is his will for the future.

The Christian Church is founded on seeming failure, on the shame of the cross. So we also have to be careful with measurements based on currently acceptable values of success. Take pioneer missionaries working for years with a people-group who had not heard the gospel before. They see little result for their labours. Later, their successors go in and within a year have reaped an impressive harvest. Were our pioneer missionaries ineffective? Perhaps – but they may have been God's workers faithfully preparing the ground for the work that was to follow. They achieved God's planned results. We need to beware too simplistic an analysis.

Time-scale is crucial in this. Some works of God cannot be accurately assessed too close to the event. Many years may need to elapse before a fuller understanding can be reached. Sometimes the time-scale is shorter: consider the period just before and just after the Resurrection – or before and after Pentecost.

Success in Christ's service is not necessarily about numbers but about faithfulness to God's call. In Jesus' early ministry he deliberately called a halt to a seemingly successful healing ministry, since he knew that his Father's purpose was for him to move elsewhere to focus on teaching. Popularity was not to come before purpose. (See, for example, Mark 1:35-39 and notice the place that prayer plays in this episode.) Hence the need to understand that 'results' cannot be seen solely in human terms.

However, the opposite does not necessarily apply! It is all too easy to slip into an attitude that assumes that God blesses failure, and that provided we keep on being faithful God will bless our endeavours. It is quite possible to think we are being faithful to a calling when we may be completely mistaken about the strategy we are adopting. Christians must firmly resist such

sloppy thinking while seeking not to equate worldly success with a sign of God's favour. We need renewed minds as well as renewed hearts as we pursue the ministry we are called to.

Summary

The model assumes that this is an area where we need to hesitate before making any pronouncements. It is however designed to seek God's will for the organisation and to offer a spiritually wise measurement of success in the following ways.

- The 12 Achievement questions are equally divided between Impact (the organisation's own view of its success or otherwise), Perceptions (the views of those outside the organisation), and Faithfulness. These provide three very different standpoints.
- Christian commitment is tested in no less than four questions (in the Validity theme), three on the Trinity and one on the organisation's understanding of and involvement in the prevailing culture.
- Particular questions challenge the organisation to consider tough issues such as closure or amalgamation (V10), regular review of its work (C12), and lessons learned from past failure (A9).
- The Assessment Group lists not just a score, but strengths, areas to improve and issues raised out of each question. Provided the whole operation is undertaken as a spiritual exercise (which the model assumes) seeking God's guidance, the danger of a too simplistic reading of results is minimised.

This extract is available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/effectiveness/em1.pdf. See also EM1 and EM2 on the site. A bound, printed summary of the model (which lists all the questions) is available – please send £3.00 (in the UK) to cover costs. The full manual is available to organisations licensed to use the model. There is no charge for its use, but the terms of the licences mean that John either runs the model for your organisation, or trains those who will run it for you. For indexes of all items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about using the model.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow.

69 Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AG Tel+Fax: 01727 832176 Web: www.john-truscott.co.uk