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*An Eschatological Framework for Assessing the Effectiveness of Business as Mission Companies*

**Abstract**

This paper attempts to address the following question: “What metric or indicator is most useful for assessing the effectiveness of BAM (Business as Mission) companies?” Several books have provided evaluative tools for assessing ministry viability and business effectiveness, but there are currently none that explicitly deal with a BAM measuring stick for holistic BAM effectiveness. This study thus will seek to offer several possible outlets for the emergence of a relational metric that can be used by BAM practitioners in a variety of different contexts. Specific avenues that will be explored include the business world, economic theory, the Christian canon, as well as church history.

**Keywords:** Business as Mission, effectiveness, Stakeholder Theory, Karl Marx, John Paul II, John Wesley, interdependence,

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Introduction

The term Business as Mission (BAM) was adopted at the Lausanne 2004 Forum Business as Mission Issue Group. From its inception the strategy uses business to assist in fulfilling the Great Commission (evangelism/reconciliation/discipleship), the Creation Commission (cultivation/productivity/stewardship), or the Great Commandment (transformation/new creation). In least-reached nations, hungry for business acumen and earning potential, BAM’s unique approach has created a door for missions in hostile environments. In May of 2014, the Global Think Tank on Business as Mission published a report titled *Scholars Needed: The Current State of Business as Mission Research.* It surveyed BAM practitioners and asked them the question: “What is the most obvious need for the BAM movement today?” The conclusive answers were, “Perhaps the most obvious need is for studies that assess the impact of business as mission, and identify the characteristics of the most effective BAM practitioners.” While several theologians and scholars engaged with business as mission have taken up the second question, the first question concerning metrics is ripe for initial inquiry.

This paper thus attempts to address the previous question: “What metric or indicator is most useful for assessing the effectiveness of BAM companies?” The paper begins with a literature review of BAM in regard to the effectiveness of Business as Mission models. The second section of the paper deals with three different views of BAM. The third section lays out possible biblical, historical, and economic foundations for BAM. The paper concludes by suggesting appropriate metrics that are most useful for evaluating the effectiveness of BAM.

Literature Review

With the intention to develop a metric to measure the effectiveness of the Business as Mission model, it is important to consider what has been written about the goal of BAM, and what suggestions have been made for statistical analysis. Originally there were three emerging “bottom lines” a socially responsible business should hold itself to: economic performance, social performance, and environmental performance. More recent practitioners and scholars have suggested a fourth metrical dimension: spiritual performance or impact (Steffen and Barnett 2006:118–19). If a BAM company has done well on all the four bottom lines, we can say that a BAM company is successful or fruitful.

The bottom lines suggested by the BAM Movement are adapted from Charles Kraft’s structural integration of culture. Kraft divides culture into six major sectors: social subsystem, political subsystem, economic subsystem,
religious subsystem, technology subsystem, and communicational subsystem (Kraft 1996:122). Because every structure is connected and interdependent, Kraft suggests that each subsystem is interdependently integrated such that a transformation in one structure will impact another sector (Kraft 1996:124). Instead of separating missions into the various categories of development, evangelism, discipleship, profit, and creation care, the BAM movement desires to utilize a holistic praxis of mission.

In theory, BAM companies operate to maximize economic, social, environmental, and evangelistic outcomes. This principle is developed from Jed Emerson. Emerson argues that value defined in economic terms is only one of at least two ways to define value. But value can be defined by social accomplishments. Up to now ways of defining value have been dichotomized. Emerson makes the case that we need to unify the concept of value incorporating both the financial and the social. What he is suggesting is a blended assessment of returns (Emerson 2003:38–39). Building upon Emerson’s argument, BAM organizations maintain that the long existing dichotomy between financial, social, and evangelistic investments need to be considered as a unified whole.

However, in practice some BAM practitioners strive to deal primarily with people's socioeconomic needs, thus putting a premium on the financial focus. For example, one multinational Christian MED organization evaluates its affiliate programs on six major performance standards. Four of these pertain to loan portfolio performance, one evaluates the program’s governance, and the final measure rates the program’s transformational focus. Consequently, many of these groups do not understand the importance of spiritual capital development.

On the contrary, other BAMers become so focused on evangelistic dynamics that they do not make profits and thus lose investment capital. They are characterized by having a missions mind-set, a heavy reliance on donor subsidies, a tendency to be smaller scale, and an evangelistic metrics of success. Because profit is essential to the sustainability of BAM business, we cannot fall into the trap of justifying an unprofitable business by calling it ministry. Once the profitability objective is sacrificed, it fails to meet the criteria of a BAM business.

In recent years, quite a number of theological educators committed to the Oikonomia Network have argued that profit by itself cannot be the sole measurement for success, and that “true economic success” is value creation, or providing a service to the common good of society and making life better for many. Kenman Wong and Scott Rae add the concept of business conduct beside the concern for financial viability. Wong and Rae note, “God requires integrity in the workplace not because it's profitable but because it's right and honors him.”
Victor Claar and Robin Klay support this notion as they highlight the importance of the integration of morality and profit. These concerns convey the requirement of moral operation for business activity—the witness of spiritual attitudes in action (Claar and Klay 2007:17, 215).

The emerging challenge is thus to determine what metric is most useful for assessing the effectiveness of BAM business. Those who apply BAM as their mission model utilize business metrics to evaluate the business aspects but very few, if any, metrics are commonly recognized to evaluate the effectiveness of BAM businesses. Several books have provided evaluative tools for assessing ministry viability and business effectiveness, but there are currently none that explicitly deal with a BAM measuring stick for holistic BAM effectiveness. Although secular social enterprises, health-care and bioethics organizations create a performance assessment framework and evaluate their short-term outputs, most are hampered by a lack of commonly recognized metrics to assess their long-term outcomes (Ebrahim and Rangan 2010:2). The proceeding section will seek to offer several possible outlets for the emergence of a relational metric that can be used by BAM practitioners in a variety of different contexts. Specific avenues that will be explored include the business world, economic theory, the Christian canon, as well as church history.

**Lesson from the Business World**

Today, many corporations seek to maximize revenues for their external shareholders. According to the shareholder view, corporations exist to increase the holdings of those with company shares (i.e., company stock). In this way, someone like Milton Friedman would say that a corporation giving money away to some social cause is like stealing it from others to give to a social cause. That is borrowed virtue. Friedman notes that when an employee agrees to work for a company, “He has direct responsibility to his employers. That responsibility is to conduct the business in accordance with their desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible” (Rae and Wong 2004:131). Friedman’s point is that any profit of a corporation belongs to the shareholders, and the company and employees are seen as a form of property from which to extract value for its shareholders. In this view, the company puts money at the center. People and company mission merely serve the core purpose of money (Rae and Wong 2004:146–51). Those who emphasize financial metrics of success exemplify the shareholder-centric view of business.

On the other hand, not-for-profit organizations or faith-based social businesses place emphasis on mission. Unlike for-profit organizations, these entities do not have shareholders and paying customers who benefit from their service. Instead, they have donors and philanthropists who help cover their operating
costs. When earning exceeds operating costs, the revenues are reinvested back to its program. This is a mission-centric paradigm for business. The dependence on philanthropists leads to two problems: 1) it makes it difficult for mission-centric organizations to scale up solutions to societal, environmental, or spiritual problems; and 2) it makes it hard to invest in staff and employees who serve its mission. Those who put mission such as church planting at the center are using a mission-centric paradigm for business and evangelistic metrics of success.

Other organizations, using stakeholder principles, suggest a way out of the two problems of mission-centric organizations. These businesses put people first, then mission, then money. The stakeholder view states that the context in which we can and should consider the place and role of a corporation is its place within the wider network of stakeholders. Here “stakeholders” refers to anyone who has a stake in the company – that is, anyone who is affected by the existence and the practices of the company. “Stakeholders” includes shareholders, employees, the community where a factory is located, the people living downwind from the smokestacks of the factory, as well as the residents downstream from where a factory is dumping chemicals into the water. Stakeholders – all those who in one way or another are affected by some company – are therefore a much wider category than shareholders. The stakeholder view of corporations assumes that we must consider the corporation’s impact on the wider community and society.

The stakeholder theory of the corporation originally derived from a 1995 academic paper written by Thomas Donaldson and Lee E. Preston (Donaldson and Preston 1995). When Donaldson and Preston wrote their paper, they could not verify that the stakeholder theory guarantees higher profits and better business performance than shareholder-centric corporations. A recent study has attempted to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence. It was written up in the book Firms of Endearment (Sisodia, Wolfe, and Sheth 2007). The book presents how a select group of corporations operating under the stakeholder theory perform fourteen times better than the firms operating with shareholder principles (Sisodia, Wolfe, and Sheth 2007:751). These firms include Costco, Google, UPS, and Whole Foods.

This new paradigm ensures that people are critical to the company’s long-term success, because the future of business relies on interdependency, and value is co-created with stakeholders. It is convincing then that the most fruitful future businesses are entities that co-create their interdependent relationships with customers, with employees, with suppliers, and with communities. Therefore, my paper takes this cue from the business world and suggests that for BAM practitioners, it is necessary to shift from using either financial or evangelistic-centered metrics of success to focus instead upon people-centered metrics of success. In order to
establish a theoretical foundation for people-centered metrics of success, it is to scripture, Church history, and economic polices that I now turn.

Theoretical foundations

Because BAM is a Christian enterprise, our theoretical investigation will begin with theological underpinnings arising from the Old and New Testaments. In Chuck Gutenson’s *Christians and the Common Good*, the author does a good job of summarizing the approach we should take to scripture as we think through the question of “what the Bible has to say” on the subjects of economics and commercial interactions. Gutenson notes that the Bible contains an ongoing narrative of God’s interactions with his people (Gutenson 2011:36–42). What this overarching narrative gives us is a picture of how God wants us to live together, how God wants us to relate to him, and how God wants us to relate to each other. What, then, are these relationships supposed to look like? God intends for people to live in loving community with one another. More specifically, to live in loving community with one another means that all people are able to participate in interdependent relationships.

In short, like stakeholder principles, the central thread running through the scripture for our financial interactions is that of a community – mirroring the interdependent relationships among the persons of the Trinity – where all people meaningfully contribute to and receive from that community. Gutenson notes, “The life of the Trinity demonstrates for us neither independence nor dependence, but rather mutual interdependence as a way of being. This mutual interdependency is what God intends for us to model toward each other” (Gutenson 2011:74). With regard to Trinitarian theory, I want to examine Karl Marx’s analysis, though Marx himself would not have imagined using his socio-economic toolset in this way. Marx is well known for his summation of humans as workers. His beginning point is that we are social creatures – relational beings. That is our nature as humans. Marx says that there are four types of alienation that occurs when humans are subjected to work: “1) Alienation from the object my production; 2) Alienation in the act of production; 3) Alienation from my species; 4) Alienation from my fellow individual humans” (Marx and Kamenka 1983:141).

Marx points out that this is a society based on commodity production, where profit maximization – based on the self-interest that is the invisible hand that moves the very market itself. This understanding of a commodity-based society inevitably leads us to view labor as simply one of the commodities. This means that people get treated as means rather than ends. The end is simply my own self-interest or, at best, the profit maximization of the businesses I am a part of, or the spiritual
fruits of the non-profit organizations. People become a commodity. But what has become of community? Marx’s relational economic scheme envisions humans working together co-creatively, so that everyone contributes something creative and unique for the good of others in the community, just as everyone participates in the fruit of the shared well being.

John Paul II makes a similar case in his encyclical *Centimus Annus.*[^13] John Paul II warns against two errors, which he calls materialism and economism. Materialism is the assumption that material things are more important than people. If we make decisions where our first thought is the effect that these decisions have on things, then there is a problem. It is materialism. The point is that our highest priority in building a business must be people instead of things. John Paul II also uses the term economism to refer to the attitude of measuring people solely on the basis of their economic value. This seems to be what Marx would call the commodification of people. John Paul II is very concerned with things like people’s rights, inadequate wages for workers, and inadequate job security. Simply put, his focus is on people.

In church history, John Wesley also focused on the whole person (D. Wright 2012:70–83). He emphasized that God’s grace can and should penetrate into every aspect of a person’s life. Wesley was keen that his Methodist leaders acquire a basic knowledge of physical diagnostics and treatments. He compiled a little book of medical advice and treatments, and he made sure each Methodist society and Methodist preacher had access to one. The principle is that, whatever line of work we are in; we should strive to become holistically knowledgeable in all areas of possible service toward others. In addition, Wesley believed that “we are called to create workplaces that meet basic needs with fairness and compassion” (D. Wright 2012:73). This Wesleyan call to stand up for basic human needs among our co-workers extends to things like abusive bosses, unhealthy work loads, and job security, all carrying the potential of causing destructive levels of stress. Furthermore, Wesley was convinced that “we are called to create workplaces that embrace the principle of peacemaking” (C. J. H. Wright 2009:78). By looking for every opportunity to do good to someone above and beyond the minimum requirement, we become reconciling bridges to others, showing them that we want to stand with them.

Wesley wrote a book on medical care called *Primitive Physick* (D. Wright 2012:71). This was his way to get out some sort of standard on healthcare for the early Methodists. Wesley saw to it that each Methodist community had a copy of the book so when the preacher came to town the people not only would hear preaching but they could also get some medical care. Wesley did not stop with giving instruction. He also “set up apothecary shops so that they [Methodist communities]
could buy the best available treatments of the day at the affordable prices” (D. Wright 2012:71). Wesley’s life inspired others to follow his example; for example, “Boots Chemists Shops” came about from a very young man named Jesse Boot. He opened his stores following “specific ideas he took from John Wesley’s Primitive Physick” (D. Wright 2012:72).

It can thus be summarized that Wesley’s holistic approach focused on the physical as well as spiritual care. This sets Wesleyans apart, in that usually religious people focus on the spiritual and leave the physical to other venues such as social services and other governmental agencies. Wesley wrote, “External worship is lost labor, without a heart devoted to God. The outward ordinances of God profit much, when they advance inward holiness.” It is obvious that Wesley is telling us it is useless to worship God on the outside while not being moved to worship God on the inside. Wesley even put it so harshly to say you are wasting your time if you are not being internally transformed by your external worship. Wesley goes on to say that “the sure and general rule for all who groan for the salvation of God is this, — whenever opportunity serves, use all the means which God has ordained; for who knows in which God will meet thee with the grace that bringeth salvation?”

Again, Wesley is giving us instructions in care for the whole person. Because we can never be sure how God will convey salvation, we must intentionally focus on the whole person.

**Empirical Evidence**

When BAM practitioners are ready to go to a mission field, it is frequently found that they start by either developing a business plan or an evangelism plan. However, very few, if any, highlight an ethnolinguistic people-centered plan. In the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century, the focal point of all missionary endeavors was unreached peoples. The concept of unreached people groups provides the metrics for assessing all missionary efforts (Casiño, Fujino, and Sisk 2012:20–21). The same principle can be applied to the BAM movement. The concept of a people-centered paradigm can offer the metrics for measuring the impact of BAM companies. Even though one can hardly find empirical evidence that people-centered metrics of success translate into better BAM holistic performance, it is critical to the development of future business as mission companies. The researcher discovered two BAM companies operating with people-centered metrics of success in Medellin, Colombia.

The first BAM company is Brownies Del Club. Mark Wittig started this business. He taught at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia as a professor of missions. While he was teaching at the seminary, he began a neighborhood soccer
tourney, using the seminary’s gym. He noticed that missionaries often get too busy with missions and lose focus on the people. One of the objectives of the soccer club was to bring the neighborhood together. There was no organized soccer club at the time. Mark organized a soccer tournament. The tournament was organized as a way to reach out to young men with the Gospel. The Christian Union Sports Club evolved out of this tournament. Today it “has 29 full-time sports staff, 88 soccer teams with 1,700 participants from the poorest neighborhoods of the city.”

Interestingly, after the sports ministry was up and running and young men were coming to Christ, some would ask: “Now what do we do to take money home to the family since we no longer want to be involved in crime?” Many of the young men were accustomed to making fast money as hit-men for the Medellin Drug Cartel. A spark of inspiration later came to Mark unexpectedly over dessert. When Mark would have Colombian friends over to eat, he would often serve brownies, and the usual reaction was one of delight, “ohh and ahh, we have never tasted anything so good!” “A little light bulb went on in Mark’s head—why don’t we make brownies and put our guys to work?!” To test the idea some samples of Mark brownies were taken to a major ice cream company. Two days later they called in their first order—they wanted 150 kilos of brownies. One of those young men by the name of Albeiro was hired to start making brownies in Mark’s home. Today Albeiro manages 14 full-time employees and 11 salespersons. The goal for this business is to make the young men both self-sufficient as well as open up opportunities for missionary service. Presently the ministry serves as a launching pad for sports missionaries sent into the Arab/Muslim world.

Rather than starting with a business plan, the company was born out of a vision to provide work and job training opportunities with the young men involved in the soccer club. Often Business as Mission (BAM) practitioners tend to put profitability or the Great Commission first, but Mark’s Brownies Del Club is a reminder that the most important thing we can do is invest in people. In my interview with Mark, he noted:

Putting the matter before the Lord is very important. Also, making the objective “people” and not “money” is essential. Finding good leadership is crucial. The business would need to fill a felt need and/or be relevant within the market place. Seeking advice and counsel is always important. Perseverance! Not giving up with the first obstacles. Look around for resources—there are plenty of people and organizations who would want to give and support. (Wittig 2017)
The second example is *Ciudad Refugio* (City of Refuge), which is a growing inner-city homeless ministry founded in 1993 when Pastor Douglas Calvano began serving sugar water with bread to the homeless, addicted, and displaced. Twenty years later, the street outreach has grown into a multi-faceted undertaking that includes a rehabilitation and discipleship program for men and women, a feeding program, a shelter for homeless men, and a vibrant inner-city church.

City of Refuge currently operates a skills training program and micro-enterprise opportunities that sustain the ministry and train those in the rehabilitation programs. In my research, I was particularly drawn to this income-generating project *Manos que Obran* (Hands that Work). “Birthed out of the need to offer work and training opportunities to men and women graduating from the organization’s restoration programs, this program teaches skills in work ethics and responsibility management, thus providing graduates with marketable skills to increase employability.” It helps people stand up on their own feet and avoid dependence. Calvano said, “Churches tend to spiritualize everything. If there is a psychological problem, there is a psychological answer.” It is through this project that the City of Refuge is both self-sustaining and self-sufficient (Calvano 2017).

The goal of this project is to transition men out of the shelter and into the restoration program to begin restoring their lives and building their futures. They believe that “addiction, prostitution, and violence are external fruits of internal problems, and that through the time invested in their program individuals allow God to heal the roots in their lives that are producing the pain leading to addiction.” In sum, “through daily Bible classes, counseling, and life discipline” the City of Refuge teaches “truth, life skills and healthy living habits while providing the opportunity for individuals to allow Christ to enter and heal their lives.”

**Discussion**

These two organizations have three commonalities: the pursuit of truth (Gospel); the pursuit of a “we-self”; and the pursuit of creative expressions of good will (love). First, I want to emphasize an environment of truth (the Gospel). Both organizations commit themselves to truth (the Gospel). A commitment to truth is not the same as simply refraining from lying. It is about cultivating a mentality where openness and honesty are the fallback position. An atmosphere pervaded by a steady stream of true information – i.e., the gospel – is a key to trust and to feelings of security at work instead of anxiety.

Second, I want to emphasize the pursuit of a “we-self” principle, which promotes partnership for living well. The we-self principle suggests that humans are innately relational, and success in life looks like mutual flourishing. It is clear that
both organizations teach that our well-being rises or falls with that of those around us. We are all in ministry together. This is the biggest key to employee/homeless loyalty. For example, if I know that the person I am working with is just as invested in my well being as his/her own, then I am not threatened by them. Rather, I am invigorated with desire to work with them. As a result, this idea of cultivating an atmosphere of we-self is important.

Third, both companies emphasize the importance of finding creative ways to express good will (love). Both firms try to make employees and homeless participants feel appreciated and valued. When we find creative ways to express good will (love) to others, they become more inclined to do the same. It is interesting that when others do find their own outlets for expressing good will through their work, people often feel like they have found the place where they belong. To use more specifically Christian language, a person’s spiritual gifting may be coming through, producing the feeling that, “I was made to do this sort of thing.”

Therefore, in terms of measuring the multiple bottom lines of a BAM company, I maintain that the best way to do this is to focus on the people-centered metrics, specifically the three pursuits: the pursuit of truth (Gospel); the pursuit of the “we-self” principle; and the pursuit of creative expressions of good will (love). Tom Morris in his book *If Aristotle Ran General Motors* uses something similar to my categories (Morris 1998). He structures his book according to four transcendentals, a theme very much in the Aristotelian tradition. Morris mentions: 1) Truth, 2) Goodness, 3) Beauty, and 4) Unity. The philosophical idea is that all objects will have these four transcendentals to some degree. And the claim is then made that all things need to exhibit these four transcendentals well if they are to flourish. For purposes of this study, we could say then that business interactions and workplace environments need to exhibit these four transcendentals if they are to truly flourish in the long run with holistic health. Workplace activity thus cultivates a certain ethos, a certain atmosphere that pervades the way everyone relates to each other at work. Morris wants to put everything ultimately under the heading of what he calls “the meaning of life” (Morris 1998:94).

By modifying the concept of Morris’s “meaning of life” for purposes of this study, I want to suggest that a people-centered and purpose-driven (the meaning of life) metric is the most appropriate method for evaluating the effectiveness of BAM. Even though this metric does not provide a universal measuring stick for evaluating the effectiveness of the BAM movement, it offers a framework for evaluating employee satisfaction, loyalty, a sense of purpose, interdependence, connectedness, and ethics. It can thus be assumed that the people-centered, purpose-driven metric can provide a tool for BAM practitioners to measure the effectiveness of BAM.
Conclusion

This paper has attempted to describe a holistic framework for measuring effectiveness of a BAM company by pulling together the business world, economic theory, the Christian canon, as well as church history. Principles from scripture, church history, economic polices, and empirical evidence are integrated as indicators usable by BAM practitioners. The result is a people-centered, purpose-driven metric that is useful for assessing employee satisfaction, loyalty, a sense of purpose, interdependence, connectedness, and ethics. As we quantify the effectiveness of BAM companies, the question we must ask of any metric is: does it help equip and encourage BAM practitioners and stakeholders to glorify God and delight in Him, who is our common good?

In order to gain deep significance for mundane work, we need something beyond a framework in which God will eventually annihilate this world as he establishes a brand new Kingdom. Instead, we need an eschatological metric focused on God’s ongoing transformation of the world. Thus, the bigger context of assessing the effectiveness of BAM companies is the incorporation of this framework into the new creation that God is indeed bringing about. In addition, as Miroslav Volf points out in his book *Work in the Spirit*, the BAM metric itself is not what is primarily significant. Rather, it is the faithfulness of our response to the call to work and business performance that is of utmost significance (Volf 1991:92–93).

End Notes


2 Cf. Ibid., 10.

3 For further discussion on the triple bottom, refer to (Savitz and Weber 2014)


5 Eldred, 202.

6 Ibid., 202-204.

7 Johnson and Rundle, 25.


This agreement is reflected in Element four of the Economic Wisdom Project, which notes that “Real economic success is about how much value you create, not how much money you make.”

Parenthesis is added.


Ibid., (9).


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