

The Role of Information

4/98 RW

Information plays a key role in every aspect of life. This is especially true in nation and city-reaching. “Discovering your nation, region, or city” is basically an exercise regarding gathering, processing and communicating information—specific information about the nation, region, or city: its societies and structures; its needs, visions and plans.

Two Realities That Set Men Free

We want the data that is gathered, the analysis that is to be performed, and the information that will be communicated and applied to be part of the body of truth that sets men free. We have in the Bible absolute reality and truth. However, for this body of truth to be effectively communicated and acted upon, understanding the realities of another realm is necessary.

We must understand the mosaic of society in the nation (city), its distinctives, functions and yearnings. We must in some insightful way understand its history, its current context, its felt needs and dynamics, and its hope and plans for the future. We must have insights into the mindset of the recent and current generations regarding Christians, Christianity, and the Church. We need to understand why some churches and groups are growing, and some are not. We need to have understanding regarding the factors impacting responsiveness and resistiveness.

These factors and others make up the body of knowledge we need to have in order to show forth and communicate effectively the love, care, truth, joy and redemptive power of Jesus Christ. The power of love and redemption requires the demonstration both, salt and light. And salt only works “in touch.” It will take a good dose of “shoe-leather” love to see the nation (city) and all its target areas and peoples transformed.

We need to know “what has been done,” “what is currently being done,” and “what is yet to be done” with regards to “making disciples” of the city and fulfilling the heavenly vision for the nation, region, or city.

It will be helpful if we view the nation (city) and area as a grouping of “target areas” and “target peoples” rather than one conglomerate. We must have a comprehension of both the geographic/geo-political, and ethnographic matrix that describes and statuses the nation and urban metropolis. We need to identify the various segments of society, and be able to describe their distinctives, contributions and needs.

Target Area and Target People

Although these terms are more or less self descriptive, some short definition and description here might be helpful. The nation (city) is made up of geography, geo-political units and ethnography (peoples) and society.

Target Area (TA). Simply stated, a “target area” is a segment of the nation, region or city, large or small, which becomes our focus for a particular purpose. This is most usually for the purposes of analysis and/or ministry. For example there may be a particular area of the city that is predominantly of one ethnic group or occupation. This particular area then becomes a “target area” for analysis and ministry. By defining the boundaries of the TA we facilitate and bring focus to analysis and ministry. Another example is most cities are divided up into districts, neighborhoods, zones or some other geo-political entity. Nation and city-reachers may want to select one of these entities, or states or provinces, as their target areas. However, they don’t really become “target areas” until they are actually targeted for some ministry or analysis.

The purpose and goal is to make the task more meaningful and manageable. Nations and cities are complex and not homogeneous-by definition. They are complex conglomerates of cultures, ethnicities, social and economic classes, religions, occupations, industries, etc.. Each nation, region and city has its own

distinctives and history.

Target Peoples (TP). This approach is another way to facilitate analysis and ministry. These groupings can be based upon any criteria. For instance, a TP could be an ethnic group, those speaking a particular language, or Asians, or college students, or shipyard workers, and so on. Most people approach ministry this way. All we are doing is using an identifying term. In actual practice you may only be concerned with one target people. They only become “target people” when there is an initiative in their regard.

We now will look in more detail at several roles of information, as well as some attributes and definitions.

First, let's look at the four “rights” that impact the value of nearly all of the information you will be using in either a nationwide, citywide or local initiative. Basically, we need to get the right information, in the right form, into the right hands, at the right time. This is prerequisite to effectively mobilizing the Body of Christ for reaching the nation (city).

You will probably detect the importance of the interrelationship of these “four rights.” Violating any one of them can jeopardize your efforts. They are listed in their logical order.

Information's Four Rights

1. The **right information.** Each step in the nation or city-reaching process will have its information needs and requirements. The right information is pertinent, accurate, and up-to-date. Right information also means having the right amount of data....not too much or too little.
2. The **right form.** Having the right information in the right form is necessary for effective management, analysis, and communication. This is a very important element in the overall research and information picture. The right form means the information can have its maximum impact and effect. Don't undersell graphics and cartographics (maps) in your presentations. A picture is still “worth a thousand words.”
3. The **right hands.** The right information in the right hands can work wonders. In the wrong hands the same info can be counter productive, harmful, and even defeating. Sooner or later the success of most efforts depend upon the right people being involved in the right way. The right hands also means those who need and can properly communicate and/or apply the information.
4. The **right time.** In most ventures time plays a crucial role. The right info made available too soon or too late could be worse than no information at all. The right time is determined by the need and development of your plan. There is a right time to gather, a right time to share, and a right time to apply the information.

Yes, when we have the right information in the right form in the right hands at the right time, it is then possible to see the whole Body of Christ in a nation (or region or city for that matter) mobilized and functioning symbiotically towards penetrating and saturating every mosaic of society with the transforming love, care, truth, joy and power of Jesus Christ. When this information is coupled with the right leadership, right vision, right goals, and right strategy, then the probability of success is high.

Management and Disciple-Making Processes

Information plays the vital role in underwriting the Management and Disciple-Making processes. These are broad categories that, in some regards, pertain to most everything involved in city-reaching. They are merely outlined here, but treated more fully in The Information Strategy Manual.² Each step of each process can serve as a check-list for what information is needed to underwrite or support them.

Management Process

1. **Vision**.....recording the vision (and perhaps Mission and/or Purpose statements)
2. **Goals and Objectives**...establishing reasonable and faith-filled measurable goals and objectives
3. **Strategies**.....formulating relevant strategies
4. **Plans**.....drafting doable plans
5. **Methods**.....selecting and implementing effective methodologies
6. **Resources**.....mobilizing and wisely allocating needed resources
7. **Evaluation**.....periodic **evaluation** of effectiveness and progress

Disciple-Making Process

1. **Penetration**.....of the various segments of society with the Living Gospel
2. **Contextualization** of the Gospel effectively (render it relevant to the target audience)
3. **Persuasion/conversion**....to become followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ
4. **Incorporation**.....of new believers into appropriate fellowships
5. **Maturation**.....of new believers in authentic Christian life
6. **Evangelization**.....of the unchurched and lost.....of new believers and fellowships
7. **Multiplication**..... of believers and congregations

Seven Roles Information Plays

As mentioned above, there are several attributes of information that play particularly important roles in various aspects of our city-reaching. This is especially true in motivating and mobilizing the Body of Christ. The following list isn't complete (the list might be limitless), but is listed here to help build awareness of some of the important roles and attributes to consider when later we are determining the information we will need, and how to treat and apply it.

1. Accountability Role

One of information's key roles is bringing the Church into accountability. The Church cannot act upon information it does not have. However, it does have a responsibility before the Lord to minister to known needs and situations in accordance with God's revealed Word, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Church has a pertinent, accurate, up-to-date picture of both, the Harvest Force and Harvest Field in the nation (city), it is then accountable to act upon this information in wholistic ministry. In any event, the Church will make a response. Hopefully it won't be ignore the information and do nothing.

2. Unifying Role

Another key role of information is its use in helping to establish unity—in purpose, direction, and function. Facts are objective. When the Body in the nation or city stands “shoulder to shoulder” to consider a set of facts, it is in a position for spawning unity. A fundamental basis for establishing unity is having or holding something or things in common (Gr. *koinos*). This then provides the basis for fellowship (*koinonia*). This is why “having the same information in common” is one of the prerequisites for mobilizing the Body of Christ in the nation or city, together with holding common vision, and having common goal ownership.

3. Nehemiah Effect

When information is strategically used in this manner to mobilize the Church to restore a city and its peoples to God, we call it the Nehemiah Effect. Nehemiah was the right person to receive the information relating to the state of the children of Israel and Jerusalem. This and subsequent information, mixed with his compassion for his God, his nation and Jerusalem, resulted in the restoration of the city, and of Israel to God. The cry, “*Let us rise up and build!*” (Neh.2:18) was the response to Nehemiah's effective acquisition and application of information, in close partnership with God.

4. Warfare Role

We are surrounded by an ongoing battle between the *Kingdom of Darkness* and the *Kingdom of Light*. Light is essential for winning the battle. We must have light (reality, truth, facts) for the task. When the Body is relying upon false suppositions, vain imaginations, or missing, outdated and/or erroneous data, the enemy has an advantage. We need to identify, so we can “bring down” the enemy’s strongholds (2 Samuel 22:46; 2 Cor. 10:4). We are vulnerable to the enemy when our decision-making is not based upon pertinent and valid facts.

5. Credibility Role

Credibility is essential for those strategically involved in discipling the city. It is gained through dealing rightly with the right information. It is quickly lost when either the dealing or the information is brought under suspicion, and found to be falty. Credibility is others perceiving that you know the facts and are using them appropriately. Our Christianity becomes more credible (relevant, acceptable and powerful) when we care enough to “find out the facts” about the needs/conditions of others.

6. Growth Role

Accurate, up-to-date, pertinent information provides the platform for Body growth, both qualitative and quantitative. We learn where, and among whom, the Body is and isn’t growing, and reveals why. We find which parts of the Harvest Field or most responsive, and which are the least...and why. Information provides the basis for making projections for future growth, and is an essential part of the process in seeing them realized. Information plays the key role in evaluating progress and effectiveness in Body growth.

7. Prayer Role

Information brings focus to prayer as well as increased meaning and motivation to our prayer life. Each citywide initiative should have an ongoing flow of pertinent data to underwrite the initiative. The research and analysis process should be constantly interacting with the united prayer process. Factual information is “prayer fodder.” Good information is the raw material for what Peter Wagner calls “smart bomb” praying. Prayer items and responses should be part of the overall information bank.

Classifications and Definitions

We have found that the following classifications of data and information are helpful in understanding the various roles information plays. We’ve broken it down into two general classifications and four sub-classifications or categories.

A. Harvest Force

Basically and technically the Harvest Force is made up of Biblical or True Christians, those who have committed their lives to Christ. Harvest Force information is that which identifies, locates, describes and statuses the Body of Christ in its various expressions, ranging from individual believers to local churches to denominations, parachurch organizations and institutions. Christian cults are considered part of the Harvest Field. Although there may be many nominals in some denominations, nevertheless for purposes of analyzing the city, all need to be included. Regarding Catholics, determinations need to be made locally as how they will be categorized.

B. Harvest Field

Categorically, the Harvest Field includes everybody and every organization and structure that is not part of the Body of Christ, the Harvest Force. Included are all religions including nominal Christians (although this will be difficult to determine in many situations) and cults. The Harvest Field is the context in which the Harvest Force finds itself. Harvest Field data includes information that identifies, locates, describes and statuses such things as: culture, ethnicity, language, politics, economics and commerce, religions (including nominal Christianity), societies mind-molders such as education, media, arts and entertainment, etc.).

C. Identity, Location, Description and Status

The information we need falls into one or more of these categories. These categories apply to both Harvest Field and Harvest Force data/information.

1. Identity

Identity includes the name and the type of entity. “Type” or “kind” of entity facilitates classification and grouping. Frontiers is a “sending agency” and also a “parachurch organization.” Identity information provides enough information for primary identification and classification. A directory of churches in a city contains primarily “identity” and “location” information. However, it could also contain some descriptive information.

* First Church’s identity it is a “local church” affiliated with denomination “X”

2. Location

Location is a vital indicator. It is important we have a picture of the distribution of both the Harvest Field and Harvest Force, and their relationship to one another. First Church has a physical location. This can be identified by address and other means. Spatial relationships provide us with a powerful picture achievable in no other way. Location information allows us to map the entities. Maps are a powerful tool for the analyst, strategist, and mobilizer.

* First Church is located at 1122 Main street, 4 miles from city center.

* There are 21 First Churches distributed in 20 cities.

3. Description

Description information can include any information that tells of the form and function of the group, organization, ministry, etc. Identifying the city is fairly simple and straightforward. Describing the city is another matter. Painting a full picture of a city’s societies, structures, and dynamics would be an endless task.

* First Church has a wide variety of programs and services. It is primarily Anglo, and reaches mostly professional people living in suburbia. It has the long-range goal of starting 12 new congregations in the next 10 years.

4. Status

Status information is that which tells the current condition or measurement. We may provide the status of a program by describing how it is currently doing, or by a percent of completion. The status of a particular church or organization may be expressed in terms of attendees or employees. Generally, status information changes. That is, what is being statused changes. We need to seek the “up-to-date status” in our analysis.

* First Church has 345 adult attendance, 5 Sunday School classes, and 30 home Bible studies.

* First Church has 3 full-time staff, and 4 part-time staff (including a bell-rope puller).

* First Church has started 2 new congregations in the past 2 years.

* “X” denomination has 65 churches with an average annual growth rate of 7.5% over the past 5 years.

The Prophetic Message

All of the foregoing is part of the formula for developing the “Prophet Message.” The Prophetic Message is developed as we see what God has been doing in the nation (or city) based upon the research and analysis, coupled with what we know He wants to do based upon His revealed Word. Our investigation has shown us what “has been done,” “what is being done,” and “what is yet to be done.” This message must be

now communicated to the wider Body of Christ. The “Lord of the Harvest” wants to lead us into deeper understanding of what must be done and how to do it, but we have first needed to equip ourselves with an accurate picture of the Harvest Field and Harvest Force.

We can expect that message to further develop to our understanding as we begin dispelling the darkness, and getting further in touch with the reality of conditions as they really exist. The Spirit of God will reveal more to His Church about how it is to carry out the Biblical mandates, and become a compassionate and redemptive force in the nation (region or city) for needed transformation.

Men and women who seriously seek God’s heart and mind are often astonished regarding the vision and conviction the Spirit gives them. Perhaps when you have become familiar with a certain situation, you experienced a strong conviction, in the light of God’s expressed desires, something should and could be done, and could visualize what that could be.

Jim Montgomery in wrapping up his chapter “The Power of Information” in his landmark book, DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches To Go, makes a highly significant observation when he states, *“One final word. In my mind, this type of church growth research can be boiled down to the simple need to know and understand how the wind of the Spirit is blowing over both the society and the Church in order to enhance our effectiveness in regard to our evangelistic mandate. From this understanding we can then get a more accurate picture of what the Spirit would want to accomplish through his Church in the succeeding months and years. This is what we refer to as the “prophetic message” that emerges from the gathering and analysis of data...”*¹

People with hearts and minds lose to the Lord can evaluate a situation from His point of view and issue forth the prophetic word as to what is to be done. Nehemiah was just such a person. Here was a man whose relationship with God is an example for all of us. As he waited upon God in extended compassionate and repentive prayer, he received not only the vision, but many parts of the plan that ultimately resulted in re-establishing the walls and restoring the people of Israel to God. And God moved on the heart of the king (Proverbs 21:1) to supply protection and resources. Nehemiah faithfully transacted business along the line of the vision God had given him, even in the face of threats and pressures from within and without. His faith and action was the result of his constant communication with, and reliance upon, God.

This illustration of receiving and facilitating the “prophetic message” can serve as a model for every nation, region, and city-reaching endeavor. As Moody stated, “God’s work, done in God’s way, will never lack God’s supply.”

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