

Title: BAM: Current Reality and Practice

Author: Christopher M. Brown (Eastern University)

Abstract:

Business as Mission (BAM) is a concept in mission theory and practice that has been emerging during the last decade. The basic concept behind BAM is that a person engaging in business can have a transformational role on a spiritual, economic, and societal level. The amount being written about BAM is increasing all the time, mostly in books and magazine articles, as seen by articles recent issues of Christianity Today and Mission Frontiers.

One of the reasons for the publicity around BAM is that, in theory, it is seen as being an important strategy in the attempt to engage people who are currently unreached by the Gospel. The people are often less reached because they live in countries with governments that are hostile to the Gospel. The reality is that many countries do not issue missionary visas, and legitimate business will allow Christians entry into these countries and access to these least reached, by means of a business visa. BAM is also attractive for business people who want to feel that their endeavors have a larger, perhaps eternal, meaning. In summary, BAM is seen by mission agencies and others as a means to incorporate new people who in the past would not have been interested in missions and to reach into areas that they were not able to reach in the past.

While the groundwork has been laid in the literature for a good understanding of the theory and history of BAM, less has been written about the scope and actual practice of this “new form of missions.” This paper seeks to fill that gap. Drawing upon my 15 years of personal experience on the field as a missionary and running businesses and on primary research with other practitioners, this paper analyzes the current state of BAM activity, provides clear definitions and descriptions of what it entails, and points towards the practices that have been proven to be most successful. In particular, this paper explores three main areas of current practice. First the paper describes the scope of what is being attempted, in which parts of the world, through what types of businesses, and the number of people pursuing BAM activity. Second, this paper considers success or failure of BAM enterprises as measured by three variables: monetary profit, social transformation, and spiritual transformation. Third, this paper identifies a list of Best Practices for Business as Mission.

Business as Mission is a concept that has been written about and explored, and it is being considered by many people. However, those attracted to this concept often do not have a clear idea of what it entails. This paper, by exploring the reality of current BAM activity and practice, will provide a foundation for missions and individuals to more fully understand the implications of engaging in this endeavor and how to best go about it.