

Radio Programming Roles

Chapter 5 – Finding Answers
by Frank Gray



Introduction

This booklet comprises the fifth chapter of Radio Programming Roles (2nd edition). The other chapters of the book are also published as stand-alone chapters in their own right.

It focuses on the subject of research – and audience research in particular.

The other chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Part 1: Roles Summarised
- Chapter 1 – Part 2: Appealing to a Wider Audience
- Chapter 1 – Part 3: For Middle Distance Listeners
- Chapter 1 – Part 4: Other Useful Roles (this volume)
- Chapter 1 – All Fourteen Roles (Parts 2-4 combined)
- Chapter 2 – The Gray Matrix
- Chapter 3 – Dimensions of the Message
- Chapter 4 – Incarnational Radio
- Chapter 6 – Using New Technology

The entire book is not yet available in printed form but the entire contents can be found on the Web at <http://radiatoroles.com>.

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5 Finding Answers

Talking about Audience Research

Imagine that someone leads you, blindfolded, onto the stage of a large auditorium. You are the speaker and the chatter of the audience suggests there are many people - but how can you get their attention?. The problem is that you don't know who they are, and you don't know why they have come. In fact you know nothing about them at all. But before you speak you are desperate to know something about them – else you don't really know what to say, how to say it, or both.

Are they young, or old? Or a mixture of both? Are they mostly male or female? Are they educated people? Farmers? Students? Business people? What do they know about me (if anything)? And what do they want to hear?

This scenario is any speaker's nightmare: not to know whom he/she is talking to, especially when they cannot see them. Yet it is not very different from what the broadcaster faces every day...

Good broadcasters are well aware of their audience and the issues of the day. They are in touch. They are close to their listener and their listener's world.

They are also people interested in other people, the things they talk about, the way they think and the things they do. They have a high level of curiosity. But how can they best satisfy that curiosity?

Research, in its many forms, is the generic term used to describe ways of finding answers. It is driven by the consuming desire to know and understand better.

Three Approaches to Research

The kinds of things we need to know can be separated out into three main areas:

1. Things we need to know before we start something new. Knowing these things will inform the planning process. Let's refer to this simply as "front-end" - what we see as we look at the front or beginning.
2. How well we have been doing. Knowing these things will confirm how close we have come to meeting our objectives and will give us some measure of success as well as what changes we need to make in order to do better. We will refer to this as "back-end" - what we see as we look back on what has been accomplished as a result of our efforts.

3. What is the current status of things. This is often referred to as a "snapshot" or picture taken at a precise time or event.

The first is concerned with analysing the context. This informs us as precisely as possible of the parameters that define our mission. It yields information vital to any new development. If we don't go through this process we will be "shooting in the dark." Using our own best intuition and knowledge - but without an objective assessment – is not an acceptable choice in the competitive media environment of today. Without doing a proper assessment we could be hopelessly wrong or off-target.

The second measures the outcomes and informs us of how well we are meeting our objectives. It is for the conscientious and courageous who are prepared to accept the findings and act upon them, making corrections and changes as necessary.

The third provides statistical information (usually) about audiences at a precise time. It helps the broadcaster plot trends and track the changing likes and dislikes of their listeners.

We will return to these later, but first we have some exploring to do...

What a good broadcaster needs to know.

What kinds of things does a good broadcaster want to know? We can divide these into three broad categories:

1. About the audience

- Their basic demographic information: age, sex, education, occupation, income, etc.
- Their listening habits: stations, times of listening, how long, kinds of programs they listen to.
- Their interests: hobbies, family issues, musical preferences, etc.

2. About the media environment

- The environment and social context in which the listener lives and works
- How the station ranks against other stations in the marketplace
- How the station, or its programs, are perceived by the community

3. About the media content

- How well the station's broadcasts meet the needs of the audience (as defined above)
- How well the overall objectives of the station are being met through the broadcasts

Let us examine these more closely...

1. About The Audience

Broadcasting is not a one-way activity but is better seen as a dynamic interactive set of activities within the community of which it is a part. Ideally the station also has a geographic presence within a community. In the event of national or international broadcasting this is not possible to the same extent: extra effort will be needed to close that gap.

A group of broadcasters in a training session compiled a fairly comprehensive listing of some of the things a Christian broadcaster might need to know about his audience. The list was extensive but it was also open-ended because there are continually things as broadcasters we must know. If we are to relate better to specific audiences or to make programs that have bite and are not full of vague generalities we constantly need to be informed. We cannot reach out to everyone, but the more we understand the needs and interests of specific sub-sets within our audience the more our programs will be listened to and appreciated by those in these groups.

The information may be generally reduced to the following classifications:

- Who is actually listening - and why?
- Who isn't listening - and why not?
- What are their interests, concerns, fears and hopes?
- What is their outlook on life?
- How much do they know and understand about Jesus Christ and the Christian message?
- How do they feel towards Christians and their behaviour in society?
- How many are listening? What are they listening to — and when? What other stations are people listening to — and why?

These are issues of interest to program producers, announcers, and script writers as well as senior management as they schedule programs, plan and make decisions. Sponsors and advertisers also crave to know the answers, many of which cannot simply be counted or quantified.

Much broadcast research is about audience size and profile since these are of the greatest interest to the marketing industry whose main concern is for ratings.

But for the purpose of this book we need to concentrate our attention on what is doable and affordable for us - and what delivers the answers we need.

Happily there are a variety of methods available to us. Which ones we decide to use will depend on what we want to know, how precise we need to be, and how much money we can afford. But as we will discover, research does not have to be expensive.

In any research endeavour it is important that we develop a framework for deciding what we need to know. Ultimately we need to ask questions that relate to the objectives of our program or specific tasks we have assigned ourselves.

Some of the best examples of audience surveys are found in the area of health promotion in the public sector.

In one community health project, for example, it was determined that its specific tasks were to Inform (activities or services), to Educate to increase knowledge to influence changes in attitude and behaviour), to Advocate (convince of the need of action for change) and to Provide for Social Learning and Dialogue (contribute to decision-making processes within community systems). It is logical, therefore, to measure the project's performance against each of these objectives to see how well it has been performing in terms of achieving these goals.

So with this in mind a research study was conducted. It consisted of a survey questionnaire which was designed around each of these areas. This way it delivered results that are very closely related to the programming strategy. It highlighted those areas that were being successful and those that were falling short or could be improved.

These results then feed back into the overall cycle of program design -> implementation -> evaluation (research) -> modification of program, etc...

Research does not stand on its own but within the wider context.

2. The Media Environment

Technological development is making a huge impact on the way we do radio. Technology used to develop at a relatively slow pace – but not any more. This means that broadcast managers need to be constantly aware of the technologies that are shaping the industry – and where we are headed. Sadly we have little control over the way in which new technologies replace old ones. This means that if we are to stay “in business” we need to keep up with the pack else a few years down the road we find we have no listeners.

Today the “radio” environment also includes new technologies such as the Internet and text messaging. These both have an impact upon what we do and how we do it better. It means that we have to track progress of emerging technologies as well as the rate at which they are being taken up by our audiences. Also with a wide variety of standards around we are much aware of the need for making the right choices – otherwise we may be making expensive mistakes.

People also use a growing number of technologies for listening to the radio. They can now listen to FM stations on their mobile phones, or to an audio stream on the Internet. They can listen via iPods and MP3 players at a time of day when it is convenient to them. How well do we understand these new listening habits - and how extensive are they?

Some careful research will help provide answers...

3. Media Content

Chapters 1 and 2 have dealt extensively with the topic of sending appropriate messages to the audience. The diagnostic aspects of the Gray Matrix have also served to remind us that it can be a useful tool for assessing whether our ministries and activities are suitable for the desired audience.

So far we know of little research that has been done to provide a thorough assessment of Christian radio broadcasts and the impact they are having. Statistical analysis of listener response has provided a comparative measure, assessing the impact of one program against another, or tracking trends in listener response as an indicator of relative audience sizes over time.

However one factor that affects broadcasters in the international context is that of which languages to use for targeting specific ethnic people. As Christian broadcasters we are vitally concerned about minority people and the languages they speak. Although trade languages are widespread we recognise the priority of speaking to people in their heart language. Over the past quarter-century so much information has become available about unreached and minority peoples. For many of them state radio, and commercial radio interests, do not have broadcasts in their own language – but we consider them important. The results have been quite amazing and minority language broadcasts have been shown to have large audiences and have made a great impact in many instances.

The selection of language also determines the cultural context of the program. The choice of music is of primary importance. Minority people often have very different cultures and traditions from majority ruling classes. They possibly live in quite a different environment and have different living standards.

The *World by Radio* initiative¹ (formerly *World by 2000*) by international Christian broadcasters has done much to coordinate the development of new language services worldwide. Their intent was to make Gospel broadcasts available in languages all people could understand

But these international broadcasters are not linguists or experts in language. They need to better understand the various dimensions of minority languages so that they can make informed choices on whether or not to start broadcasts in a new language. This has often led them to work in partnership with other agencies.

The unique role that radio can play in world mission requires that Christian broadcasters work with other mission agencies and churches on the ground. They often need their partnership. Partners also recognise the impact that Christian broadcasts make on the work they are doing. A synergy of mutual appreciation develops.

But our understanding of the needs on the ground does not come without work and effort. Research is being done by many agencies and the findings now readily

¹ <http://wbradio.org>

available via the Internet. The *Joshua Project*² has done much to bring together the joint efforts of many agencies and combine it with the latest mission information available.

B. How Answers can be Found

How can broadcasters find the answers? There are a variety of ways. It depends a lot on what we want to know and how much we can afford. Some of the most immediate research costs nothing except time and dedication. We will identify some of the key methods we might use beginning with those that are the most doable and affordable.

There are a variety of methods available to us. Which methods we decide to use will depend on what we want to know, how precise we need to be, and how much money we can afford. But as we will discover it does not have to be expensive...

1. Observational methods

Your immediate environment is the best source. That fact is often overlooked, but it can be the best place to start looking...

One of the dangers of talking about research is that it suggests that we need to have a lot of money and resources in order to do it. That is not necessarily the case. There are many types of 'rough-and-ready' research that can be done. Many of these are more of a way of life than a specific event. They are conducted by simply observing...

In many developing countries — especially in rural situations — it is often difficult, or even impossible, to conduct formal research. It does not work – or it is simply not affordable.

For Feba Radio in India there was a simple solution: a staff member went down the streets while the broadcast was on the air and counted the number of houses from which he could hear the Seychelles shortwave broadcasts coming. It was at a time where there were many listeners. It may not work today due to the decline of shortwave listening in many places but at that time it worked and provided a useful snapshot of the listening level in that specific location.

Dr Ross James describes an observation technique known as *cultural analysis*. He has written an interesting article entitled *Read the Media and Ask "Why?"* which describes cultural analysis and covers the investigation of cultural products.

He writes:

The technique is a form of research known as cultural analysis, the investigation of cultural products - objects, behaviour, ideas and institutions that individuals and groups create and use in their personal and collective lives. The symbolic meaning of clothing such as jeans, police

² <http://www.joshuaproject.net>

communication codes, sports, children's toys, office space and food are examples of cultural products which have been well documented.

Films, novels, magazines and so on are also cultural products. For our purposes, we'll label them specifically as media products. Media products communicate the conscious and unconscious values, attitudes, and behaviour patterns of their audiences. Broadly speaking, this happens in two ways.

Firstly, communication research shows us that media products reflect their audience in some way because individuals with similar interests and needs will expose themselves to similar media products. So, when communicators in Pakistan asked members of their target audience, college students, 'What magazine do you read more than any other?' it was no surprise to see one title emerge as a clear preference. Writers now subscribe to that magazine to remain informed about influences which motivate, worry, entertain and interest the students. The magazine reflects the sub-culture of college students to college students.

*Secondly, media analysis is a framework for identifying why audiences respond in the way they do to media products. Our analysis moves from what we see, what is actually there (surface level) to what it means (second level) and to why it has meaning (third level). Salman Rushdie's controversial *Satanic Verses* is a helpful example. Surface-level content (actual words, plot, characters) meant different things to different people (to some they were associated with blasphemy, to others - creativity). The connotative power of those second-level meanings were driven by third-level motivational values - deeply-rooted ideological assumptions that answer the question, "But why does it mean this?" The response of one group was aroused by religious belief, and that of another group by humanitarian ideals of freedom of speech.*

Although Christian people may think they understand their own native culture well the fact is that they too easily develop a ghetto mentality. They tend to only engage with people who believe the same, think the same, and speak the same "language". Moreover, they are guilty of the tendency of watching TV or movies, reading newspapers and magazines, soaking up advertising, etc. without engaging their minds to consciously analyse what values they are being exposed to. As indicated in Chapter 3 Christian values are often quite the opposite of those expressed through secular media.

2. Secondary sources

Before we start thinking of planning our own research exercise we need to first ask if there are already studies in existence that are available. There are in many instances large volumes of information for us to tap into. Apart from advertising agencies and other broadcasters, many other agencies also have an interest in the same kinds of demographic information that we seek.. These include government organisations as well as international agencies such as UNESCO.

Much of this information is now available on the Internet and search engines, like Google, can quickly locate web sites that may contain exactly the information we need. Or they may be able to point us to where we can find it.

Newspapers and periodicals are also a great source of current information and archives are usually available on the Web. Many broadcasters of repute have web

sites of their own that contain much archived information and threads that provide background to today's news stories. Use them. The on-line encyclopedia - Wikipedia - is a great place to start searching.

For those who do not have good Internet access there are many encyclopedias today available on CD-ROM and are not expensive. They should become a standard part of the library of any station or production studio for quick and easy research on a wide range of basic topics, especially where Internet access is problematic.

Failing that, there are still research libraries in many cities often located at universities and colleges.

3. Analysis of existing feedback

The fact that regular feedback from listeners provides a wealth of knowledge about our listeners can easily be overlooked. Letters get answered, then filed away or disposed of without any statistical analysis being done of what their writers are expressing or where they are located, etc.

But before elaborating on this it must be said — very clearly — that this kind of research has severe limitations. This is because it only provides insights into those who make contact with us. It does not tell us about those who listen but never make contact. Nor does it tell us anything reliable about those who don't listen. Many letters received by FEBC in Manila were from non-listeners in India and faraway places such as Africa who had heard that FEBC was a good place to write to get Bibles. Even after Manila's Overseas English service was discontinued in 2000 letters continued to arrive. Results will therefore be skewed in favour of those who are sympathetic to what we say and want to interact with us in some way or other. But letter-writers are not representative of the whole.

However, on the positive side, response analysis gives a lot of insights to programmers. For instance, listeners from some cultures write very personal letters, deep from the heart, while from others, requests for Bible Correspondence Courses are very popular. Another might yield all kinds of questions about Christianity.

If these limitations are clearly understood at the outset the information learned can be of great value to our broadcasters.

Tracking listener responses over the years, as FEBC has done, shows the general trends happening in the media environment. Thus, fifteen years ago, most of the responses arrived as letters, while today, the majority of responses arrive as emails or text messages to the broadcaster. Content of the text message may not be as 'deep' as content of the letter or an email. But text messages have their place, promoting interaction with the broadcaster, which is very much 'in' in today's local media environments.

Two studies conducted by FEBC illustrate the benefits of analysing listener mail.

a. In 1980 China had just begun to open its doors and floods of mail began to arrive in FEBC's Hong Kong office. At the same time plans were being made to develop special radio programs aimed at training Christian leaders inside China. But how much did we know about their needs or other factors such as their educational level? A potential sponsoring agency hesitated to provide funds unless a research study could be conducted to demonstrate in quantifiable terms the needs of such leaders. Because of the political situation it was deemed impossible to conduct any such research — until the idea came up of analysing the 33,000 letters that had at that time been received.

Analysis of the letters revealed that around 270 writers could be identified as being church leaders — so their letters were set aside for further in-depth study. These were further analysed and yielded a mass of useful information that brought understanding regarding these pastors. We learned about their age and educational background, the needs they expressed and the problems they faced in their congregations or house-groups.

A summary report was prepared which duly satisfied the requirements of the funding agency. But it also provided statistics that sharpened understanding of these leaders and the programming that was needed to help meet their needs. The end result was a comprehensive program series called *Village Bible School* which over a 3-year period sought to provide the equivalent of a Bible School education. This was later replaced by an upgraded program series, *Voice of Friendship Seminary*, which continues to this day.

b. A second example comes from FEBC's Burmese language service. They needed to find out more about their audience in the former Myanmar capital of Yangon (Rangoon). So to do this a very basic set of nine questions was devised that could be asked over the air in the Burmese language broadcasts from both Manila and Saipan. A small gift was offered in return for every complete set of answers received on postcards in the Yangon office. The questions were asked over a period of ten days. They asked details of the listener's age, city, education, occupation, what program they liked most, and their station and time preferences. They also asked two questions that were of special significance: one problem they faced, and one problem their family faced.

The response was beyond expectation as over 4000 postcards poured in from Burmese listeners across Myanmar. All had to be hand-carried to Manila for analysis. Particularly significant was the large percentage of non-Christian respondents. The program staff also derived valuable feedback regarding listeners' expressed needs. They were also able to respond to them in subsequent broadcasts. Overall it was extremely low cost. The give-away was a specially designed calendar celebrating 25 years of Burmese broadcasts from Manila. These were hand-carried back into Myanmar and mailed to listeners from there.

A hyperlink to the full report of the research and its findings by Eila Romo-Murphy who co-ordinated the statistical analysis can be found in the Appendix. It provides an excellent example of low-cost research when other forms of survey were impossible.

4. Focus Groups

Much attention these days is being given to encouraging the use of focus groups. These are small groups of people who represent the target audience and who are assembled to review pilot programs, or talk about specific topics, together. The program is played to the group and their responses to it are monitored. They are also asked questions about the program. Or, depending on the group, the group discusses a topic given to them, for example their social needs, or health needs, and the content of the discussion can be used to give a wealth of materials for programming.

The emphasis here is on the quality of the program and the level of interest it generates among potential listeners. The content and style of the program can then be adjusted accordingly as a result of the in-depth study.

Focus group research therefore concentrates on the "front end" — the programming content and appeal — rather than the actual numbers of listeners.

5. Listener Panels

These are normally drawn from among faithful listeners on the mailing list of the station. These are people who have demonstrated a close interest in the station and the quality of its output. They may also be listeners who contribute financially to the station and want to ensure that the station is providing what they consider to be good programming.

How do listener panels work? Often they work informally as staff members from the station will visit these individuals, or groups of individuals together, to gauge how they feel about the station's programs and any changes that have been made – or which are being contemplated. It also provides opportunity for devoted followers of the station to express their ideas and make suggestions and criticisms.

In the United Kingdom the BBC enrolled volunteers who would keep diaries of what they listened to or watched on TV each day. Each month these would be collected and analysed against the profile of the diarist. This enabled trends to be plotted and on-going analysis to be done at low cost.

There are a number of advantages to these listener panels — but also distinct disadvantages. The main advantage is that these are people who are motivated and have a keen interest in seeing the station succeed. The chief disadvantage of this approach, however, is that the panels represent only a sub-set of the potential audience and are not representative of the interests of the whole. To combat this it is necessary, therefore, to select listener panels that represent the various sub-sets of the audience to be reached by the station. If this is not done the aims of the station may not be met while a minority only are hearing programs they consider to be beneficial (to them!).

6. Survey Research

It is a fact that broadcast stations for the most part have to compete in a market-driven economy. This is becoming increasingly so as de-regulation of the media takes over

and government monopolies are broken down. Commercial factors now determine that radio stations compete for audiences and the chief interest of any advertiser is to know how many people are listening and at what times of day. Because of this there is already a well-developed industry whose sole aim is to research and document peoples' listening habits and preferences in various locations - cities, towns and villages - around the country.

Such research is usually in the form of survey research whereby a large number of people (usually 1000 or more) are selected at random and asked questions regarding their listening and viewing habits over the past week. In that way a 'snapshot' is taken of the media scene at that time and the relative audiences. From that knowledge a fairly accurate picture can be drawn. Accuracy will depend on the size of the sample interviewed and the randomness with which they were drawn from the total.

Studies of this kind are being conducted continually and their findings published. Sadly Christian broadcasters often are unaware of their existence or take little interest. Reports are sometimes available free of charge if one has contacts within the advertising industry. Otherwise surveys need to be bought - perhaps at a discount for non-profit organisations.

Locally, nationally, and internationally the situation will change, however. The main concerns for international broadcasters are not normally driven by commercial interests - but by political or ideological ones. International research also tends to be a lot more expensive on account of the fact that audiences to international broadcasts are more widely scattered and less easy to identify in a broad coverage area. The sample size has therefore to be quite large to give any reliability. However, large international broadcasters such as Voice of America and BBC have been sponsoring audience research of this kind in various countries to determine the sizes of their audiences and to justify to their respective governments the validity of the broadcast services they provide. Recent trends, however, suggest that this kind of quantitative analysis is tailing off and is being replaced by qualitative as a more useful guide.

Where international research has been done it has often been made available for others to buy. The Intersearch group (formerly known as International Communications Research for Evangelism (ICRE)) is a consortium of international Christian broadcasters who buy research studies from the IBB, BBC, Intermedia and others. Sometimes they have been able to arrange for questions to be added into the survey (like "Do you ever listen to religious broadcasts? If so, which stations?"). Or they arrange to insert their on-air identification to the prompt list of stations listened to, thereby making the surveys of much greater value to Christian broadcasters.

In-House Research

Christian broadcasters sometimes opt to do their own research but there are restrictions on what they can afford to do by way of survey research because of the cost. At the international level such costs are prohibitive and the logistics of conducting surveys in restricted access countries often make the exercise impossible.

However, there is often interest in conducting surveys for local station audiences. For this reason it is important that our own staff be trained in conducting research studies of their own and as needed.

In 2002 FEBC's station WIND-FM in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia conducted two research studies concurrently, each with a specific purpose. The first of these was a random sample urban survey with a sample size of 1000. Its main purpose was to determine the size of audiences to local as well as foreign radio stations. It also probed for media habits and the use of consumer electronics. An article on the survey³ was published by *Media Asia*.

The second was a series of focus group studies among the local community around the station to come to a better understanding of how the FM station might better meet their needs and interests. There were two sets of focus groups; one set was made up of listeners to the stations, and they discussed positive and negative points of the radio station performance. The other set of focus groups discussed information needs in the community. The results of both focus groups provided feedback to the station about their performance, as well as ideas to build new programming on, based on the information needs expressed in the focus groups.

New research methodology is also being developed. This is driven by the difficulties experienced in many locations and also by the need for culturally-appropriate methods which will deliver reliable results. One such methodology was recently employed in Indonesia. The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique⁴ was employed to measure impact of a local radio station on the local community. MSC is still in its infancy having been developed in the last decade. It uses informal means to help identify changes that have occurred as a direct result of new interventions. It is relatively inexpensive to conduct and is adaptable into culturally-sensitive contexts.

For further study in this area of research we recommend Søggaard's book "Research in Church and Mission"⁵ which provides a good overview with many practical examples of conducting research in the context of Christian work.

Why Bother?

If the message of our broadcasts is all important why should we be so concerned about doing research? Surely, some will argue, God will make certain that the right people listen at the right time. That is His business. For our part we should just be faithful in preaching the Word!

The above is a viewpoint that is often expressed. If we buy into this we can save ourselves a lot of anguish over the quality of our programs, the number of letters we

³ See *Media Asia*, vol 30, number 2, 2003, pp. 103-107 or go to http://h-c-r.org/docs/mongolia_amic_2003_ub2002.pdf

⁴ See MandE News website <http://www.mande.co.uk/MSc.htm>

⁵ *Research in Church and Mission*, Viggo Søggaard, 1996, William Carey Library, Pasadena

receive, as well as budgets to do research. It makes life a lot easier. But is this a responsible approach?

One would hope that this chapter has already made the reader aware of the importance of the many aspects of research – clearly identifiable areas where we need to find answers and effectively make visible what has been invisible. Søggaard talks of research as “information that makes us relevant”⁶ in his excellent overview of various kinds of research relevant to missional enterprise.

At the beginning of this chapter we started out by making a case for doing research based upon our curiosity – the need to know and understand our listener better. But there is a stronger case to be made than that. Consider the following:

1. Objectivity

The impact of the media has never been a precise science because it is difficult to quantify. The easiest thing to measure is the number of responses received from listeners – but even that can be very misleading and can lead to wrong conclusions. The other is a statistical measurement of the size of the audience through survey research.

But the point is that we need to encourage objectivity so that we can have a basis for knowing whether what we are doing is worth doing and whether it is having a desirable impact. We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our supporters – but above all we owe it to our listeners. Without it we do not have a basis for tracking trends and for making comparisons.

2. Decision-making

The objectivity we strive for will also provide the information needed by management. All sorts of information is needed at planning time. This ranges from technical planning as we anticipate what the demands on our equipment will be in the future, to the ever-present financial planning that is often needed when budgets need cutting back.

It also has to do with prioritising our services and resources. Informed decision-making is based on reliable facts – and that means the necessity for research.

3. Stewardship and Accountability

Today’s donors and sponsors require good accountability. With non-profit organisations now coming under closer scrutiny it is imperative that we have our house in order and can demonstrate the highest integrity in all that we do – and to whomever we are held accountable. Funds are in limited supply so it is important that we do the best with what we have as good stewards. If broadcast services can be shown to be falling short of what is expected then we have to trim them until the problem is rectified.

⁶ *Media in Church and Mission*, Viggo Søggaard, 1993, William Carey Library, Pasadena ch. 4 p.77

Conclusions

Earlier we noted that there were three kinds of research: Front-end and back-end, and the snapshots that help us monitor the present and the way things look today.

- The first is concerned with analysing the context and informing us as precisely as possible of the parameters that define our mission.
- The second measures the outcomes and informs us of how well we are meeting our objectives.
- The third provides us with daily programming insights as broadcasters and keeps us on track with our listeners.

Much missiological research tends to be front-end. Pages and pages of statistics are now available in print or on the Internet. All of them provide insights into the various dimensions of mission or the media scene around the world. All of them are changing – either as more knowledge becomes available, or because of the constantly changing media environment in which we operate.

Back-end research that measures effectiveness and outcomes is not so common, however. This could be for several reasons. Here are a few:

- It is not easily quantifiable and therefore difficult to measure
- It is potentially harmful and threatening - because it reveals hard truths that the broadcaster or his sponsors would not be happy about
- There were no clear objectives in the first place
- It is labour-intensive and therefore potentially expensive to do well
- Results and effectiveness are seen as God's problem - not ours

Both front-end and back-end belong to management and the research department. But the third has to be the life-blood of the programming department. Without it the broadcaster is blindfolded and in danger of speaking only to blank walls or to an audience different from the one he intends.

Something to think about...

But how important are numbers? There is a danger that we can be hung up on the sizes of our audiences. Should we not be more concerned with the impact that our broadcasts are having on our listeners and the community as a whole? Numbers are not everything. As someone has wisely observed we should not be attempting to compete with the commercial world by trying to do what they do well. Instead we should focus on what we do well at — and what they cannot provide.

Postscript

If you want to engage in further discussion on this topic kindly visit the Radio Roles web-site using either the Contact Us tab or the blog.

You can also read up more about The Gray Matrix at the dedicated web-site:

<http://thegraymatrix.info>

Further Information

You can download further copies of this document by visiting the Radio Roles web-site at http://radiatoroles.com/downloads/rpr_ch5.pdf