

## Business as Mission Article for GGCN, January 2010

Original article/outline:

[https://www.ggcn.org/wp-content/uploads/tokyo2010/resources/Tokyo2010\\_C\\_Plummer.pdf](https://www.ggcn.org/wp-content/uploads/tokyo2010/resources/Tokyo2010_C_Plummer.pdf)

# Business as Mission: A Decade on from Tokyo 2010

## Introduction

Business, done well, is glorifying to God and has enormous potential to do good. Business has an innate God-given power to create dignified jobs, to multiply resources, to provide for families and communities and to push forward innovation and development in human society. In the global marketplace today, we have an enormous opportunity to leverage this God-given potential of business to address some of the world's most pressing spiritual, social, environmental, and economic issues. Business skills are increasingly being used to serve people, make a profit, be good stewards of the planet, and align with God's purposes; including taking the whole gospel to the ends of the earth.

This is "business as mission" – a movement of business people using the gifts of entrepreneurship and good management to bring creative and long-term, sustainable solutions to global challenges. This movement is growing worldwide; those serving God in the marketplace and intentionally shaping their businesses for God's glory, the gospel, and the common good, as people and communities are positively transformed through for-profit business activities.

## A Growing Movement

Today, the global business as mission (BAM) movement is diverse and speaks many languages. It has many moving and growing parts. Although an obvious focus and target audience for business as mission is business and business people, we recognize that to achieve holistic transformation on a macro scale, with intergenerational perspectives, we need to build an ecosystem. Thus, BAM has four main constituencies, including leaders from business, missions, church and academia; and the growing movement is reflected in a plethora of initiatives in all four constituencies. There are an increasing number of larger and more long-lasting BAM businesses, including SMEs and large size companies. There are also a growing number of BAM incubators and accelerators, investment, consulting and training organizations.

There are industry-related BAM groups such as the Coffee as Mission network which has more than 400 members representing over one hundred BAM business dealing with coffee, from plant to cup. Similarly, the Freedom Business Alliance<sup>1</sup> has over 100 freedom businesses in its global trade association networking companies of all types that fight human trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> FBA, see <https://www.freedombusinessalliance.com/>

Within the movement there are also well established national or regional networks that operate in languages like Korean, Portuguese, and Chinese,<sup>2</sup> and these convene conferences and publish language-specific materials on BAM.

Almost all of the oldest and largest evangelical mission agencies in the world have embraced BAM and are pursuing ways of putting it into practice. There is also an increasing number of local churches and major denominations around the globe involved in BAM. The same applies to various academic institutions, and the number of academic theses on BAM continues to grow. Every year there are major BAM conferences on every continent.

These are just a few examples of BAM-related initiatives in the global BAM movement that help build the ecosystem around BAM companies.

## Staying the Course

As is to be expected, the biblical foundation for business as mission remains consistent, and as important as ever. A recently published paper in *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*<sup>3</sup> on the growth of the business as mission movement neatly echoes the Tokyo 2010 BAM Taskforce discussion paper, as follows:

Business as mission is founded on three biblical mandates:

The *cultural* mandate, to ‘tend the garden’ (Genesis 1, 2) stewarding creation and engaging in resource-multiplying activities that aid human flourishing;

The *great commandment*, to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 25: 35-40) to care for the poor and vulnerable and fight injustice; and

The *great commission* mandate, to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28: 16-20) to share Jesus’ good news of the Kingdom and his commandments as we are going out into the world.

The original 2010 outline exhorted that,

These three mandates must be at the forefront when we plan and run BAM businesses. It is equally important that these three serve as a context as we continuously evaluate our practical BAM mission. We must be aware of the risk of mission drift. One may start out with high hopes and ambitions regarding all three mandates, but eventually end up just operating a business. Our unique contribution and responsibility as BAM practitioners rests on the threefold mandate.

Guarding against mission drift remains absolutely essential for business as mission practitioners. This is particularly true as the BAM movement is maturing, with many more

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<sup>2</sup> One example, see <http://www.chinesebam.com/>

<sup>3</sup> [A Growing Global Movement: Business as Mission](#) – Jo Plummer and Mats Tunehag (January 2020): *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* Volume 56 Issue 1

companies now entering their second, third or even fourth decade. More and more founders are urgently considering the issue of succession planning as they seek to hand off their initiatives to a next generation of like-minded practitioners with the right skill-sets to stay on course for long-term business growth and missional impact. Succession, keeping “mission true”, and ensuring the longevity of BAM companies have become critical issues for the movement today.

## Reflection on Needs and Gaps in the BAM Movement

The original article identified eight particular “needs and gaps” taken from a longer article by Mats Tunehag<sup>4</sup>, that provided a focus for the BAM Taskforce discussion at Tokyo 2010. I would like to unpack these eight areas, briefly commenting on progress over the past decade, as well as adding dimensions that have been more recently identified or further clarified.

### 1. Vision Impartation

Although the business as mission movement has grown significantly in the past decade, business people and business skills continue to remain a significant untapped resource in the global church. Overcoming this issue was the focus of the 2015 BAM Global Think Tank Report on Advocacy and Mobilisation<sup>5</sup>. This consultation process, drawing on mobilisation experiences on all continents, identified ten major themes that represent the most important challenges and opportunities for creating greater understanding and participation in BAM. These ten themes have significant overlap with the eight ‘needs and gaps’ identified previously, and as such some will be highlighted below.

Two of these ten themes particularly relate to vision impartation:

#### *The world is primed for business*

The global context for business remains a significant opportunity. Entrepreneurship, particularly social entrepreneurship, is in vogue and there is an explosion of dialogue and action around enterprise solutions to poverty, ethical business, social enterprises, benefit corporations, impact investing and on and on. The world is open for business, even in places that might be hostile to other kinds of missional approach.

#### *BAM is a message that resonates*

Business as mission is part of a wider movement towards the greater integration of faith and work that has many strong advocates. In addition, many in the contemporary Church care deeply about issues related to both social injustice and unreached peoples. BAM resonates with Christians that are looking for more purpose in their vocation, which is especially true of millennials.

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<sup>4</sup> See:

<http://www.matstunehag.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/The-Mission-of-Business-CSR+1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> BAM Advocacy and Mobilisation Report, see: <https://bamglobal.org/report-mobilisation/>

A decade ago there was a greater delineation within the BAM movement between those who came from a missionary background, and had adapted to learn to run a business; and those who had come from a business background, applying their skills intentionally to global mission. Now, in addition to BAM practitioners from a variety of different backgrounds, we are seeing the emergence of a new generation of practitioners who caught the vision for BAM early on and have since intentionally prepared for BAM practice with a variety of custom-made experiences and training.

## **2. Concept Clarification**

Although BAM is now a much more widely accepted and understood mission strategy, it is still relatively new, especially in certain regions of the world. Thus BAM needs continued clarification, or as the Advocacy and Mobilisation Report puts it, 'we need to patiently overcome misconceptions'.

Since Tokyo 2010, the following working definition for BAM has been developed by the BAM Global network to enable meaningful conversation and constructive collaboration:

Business as mission is:

- Profitable and sustainable businesses;
- Intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations;
- Focused on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental and spiritual outcomes;
- Concerned about the world's poorest and least evangelized peoples.

This definition has been, and continues to be, absolutely essential to be able to develop and grow a cohesive and global movement. Although a number of different terms are in use for the same or similar ideas, there is a growing consensus and cohesion around this concept, both what it is and what it isn't.

In the past decade, we have noticeably moved away from confusion with 'business for mission' (business only seen as a source of funds for doing mission), 'business as visa' (business merely as a way of gaining a visa), or 'shell companies' (setting up a fake business to give you a front in creative access nation). Although business can undoubtedly be a good way to get a long-term visa, there is now a greater clarity that the power of a business model extends far beyond that. Practitioners increasingly understand that to have a credible, sustainable role in a community, their company has to be credible and sustainable. That means aiming towards excellence in business practice and the true integration of holistic missional goals into every aspect of a company – from business plan, to daily business life. The idea of integration is important. This is not 'ministry' tacked onto business for convenience or business tacked onto ministry. Instead the mission is worked out in and through the business, through its activities, through the products and services, and through its relationships.

### **3. Education and Training**

Education and training remains a vital activity for the maturing of the movement. The Advocacy and Mobilisation Report identified that the sacred-secular divide remains a serious hindrance to business as mission. A biblical framework for business, work and economics is often lacking among would-be BAM practitioners, and as the 2010 article put it: there is a definite need for BAM to be taught in Bible colleges, mission courses and theological seminaries.

Most BAM practitioners require some kind of intentional missiological and/or business preparation, as well as equipping in skills such as management, cross-cultural communication, language acquisition, and so on – depending on their background and experience to date. Partnership with the church, mission agencies and academic institutions remains essential for multiplying training opportunities and curriculums.

### **4. Capital**

The 2010 discussion outline focused on the need for financial capital for BAM enterprises. This is still a vital need, which will be met by multiplying the number of funding sources available to BAM companies, as well as helping more companies become investible by developing rigorous plans for both financial and missional sustainability.

However, in the past decade, greater consideration has also been given to the adequate provision of other kinds of capital, for instance, human capital, relational (or social) capital, natural capital, intellectual capital, spiritual capital, and so on. There has been more focus on growing a healthy 'BAM ecosystem' to adequately support BAM practitioners and resource BAM companies. The number of initiatives focused on this goal has multiplied and become more globally diverse and connected, although greater resourcing and collaboration remain strategic priorities.

### **5. Mentors**

Mentoring is a particular form of intellectual and relational capital that is still very much needed. One obvious development in the past decade is that as we have matured as a movement we now have a greater number of practitioners with knowledge and experience to pass on.

Demand remains high for mission-minded mentors, coaches and advisory board members from all industries, regions and business disciplines to help bring long-term stability and sustainability to BAM practitioners and companies.

### **6. Prayer**

The Advocacy and Mobilisation Report highlighted perhaps our most important strength and opportunity: that God is already on the move in the global marketplace. Prayer is thus vital

work in the BAM community as we find ourselves co-workers with the Holy Spirit and engaging in spiritual warfare in daily business life.

Recently there has been a call by some very experienced BAM practitioners to not neglect our own prayer life or spiritual disciplines<sup>6</sup>. A distinctive of business as mission versus a regular company, or even most social enterprises, is that we are seeking spiritual fruit, as well as a positive financial, social and environmental impact. As Jesus reminds us in John 15 verse 4, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” The exhortation in the 2010 outline holds true: we must soak all our efforts in prayer, which is even more critical as we enter into the market place with a Kingdom of God invasion strategy. BAM practitioners must have prayer partners who intercede for them, their businesses, their employees, their relationships, and their impact on people and communities.

## **7 . Case studies**

Documented BAM case studies and stories continue to be critical for BAM growth and serve a dual function:

Firstly, case studies have a teaching and mobilising role for prospective BAM practitioners as the power of a good story helps bring the concept of business as mission to life in an inspirational format. This is especially true as we reach out to a generation for whom tangible experience is of paramount importance.

Secondly, they allow us to learn from real-life experiences and draw out principles and fruitful practices. A trend in the past ten years is the multiplication of the number of BAM case studies to draw on with new books and papers published<sup>7</sup>. There has been a specific focus on “think tank” processes that have brought groups together to listen, learn, and share fruitful practices. Work on the BAM Global Think Tank began in 2011 and to date, around 30 reports have been published<sup>8</sup> to disseminate the findings. Most of these reports draw on relevant case studies and focus on a diverse range of topics, from BAM and Church Planting, to BAM Incubation, to BAM and Human Trafficking; as well as geographically-focused reports.

## **8. Evaluative tools**

The final gap identified by the Tokyo 2010 discussion outline on BAM was: the need to develop instruments using agreed key indicators of personal and societal transformation which will help measure the quadruple bottom-line impact of BAM.

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<sup>6</sup> What is Success? Advancing Spiritual Impact in BAM (May 2019) Published article on The BAM Review blog <https://businessasmission.com/what-is-success-advancing-spiritual-impact-in-bam/>

<sup>7</sup> A notable recent example is “BAM Global Movement” which has 25 or so case studies linked to concept clarification, see: <http://matstunehag.com/2018/04/25/bam-global-movement-business-as-mission-concept-and-stories/>

<sup>8</sup> BAM Global Reports series, see: <https://bamglobal.org/reports/>

This remains a critical point of discussion within the BAM community. For instance, in the BAM Global Consultation on BAM and Mission Agencies which is currently ongoing, one of the four key issues to address has been 'The Effective Integration of Business as Mission'. This includes clearly defining what positive impact or "success" looks like for agencies engaged in BAM, as well as developing metrics and tools that will help evaluate progress towards this impact. The BAM Global Think Tank Report on Measuring BAM Impact<sup>9</sup> published in 2014 made a start on this challenging topic.

How success is defined and measured will somewhat depend on the business model, the vision for the company, and the values and personal motivation and call of the practitioner. One gap that was clearly identified through the BAM Global Think Tank process and Congress in 2012 to 2013 was a relative lack of focus by BAM practitioners on the 'environmental bottom line' of business as mission. To redress this balance, a BAM Global Consultation on BAM and Creation Care is currently underway.

## Looking Forward

By way of conclusion, I'd like to summarise some of the concerns and strategic issues outlined above into four characteristics we hope will increase as we continue to grow as a movement:

### **Four Characteristics for BAM Movement Growth:**

**Greater Depth** – Avoiding mission drift and maintaining spiritual fruit by remaining deeply rooted in biblical truth and Christ-centered.

**Greater Breadth** – Putting the global into the BAM global movement by encouraging national and regional groups to develop language-specific and geographically-based resources and networks.

**Greater Connectivity** – As resources and initiatives continue to be developed by a growing number of entities in the BAM ecosystem, ensuring these are more effectively multiplied and utilized by growing the number of connections and collaborative partnerships.

**Increasingly Evaluative** – Continuing to be intentional about learning and drawing out fruitful practices from our BAM experiences in order to pass them on. Also, that we will have clearer views of what success looks like for a BAM company and increasingly effective ways to evaluate progress.

In closing, my prayer is that the Lord would continue to teach us, that he will help us to multiply and bear fruit for his Kingdom's sake, as we continue to work on these characteristics and strategic issues.

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<sup>9</sup> Measuring BAM Impact Report, see, <https://bamglobal.org/report-measuring/>

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This paper draws on material previously published, as follows:

[A Growing Global Movement: Business as Mission](#) – Jo Plummer and Mats Tunehag (January 2020): Evangelical Missions Quarterly Volume 56 Issue 1

[BAM and the Global Workplace](#) – Jo Plummer (May 2019): Advance Paper for the Lausanne Global Workplace Forum

[What is Business as Mission?](#) – Jo Plummer (August 2018): From the *Get Started* section of [businessasmission.com](http://businessasmission.com)

[Advocacy and Mobilisation: Marketing, Messaging and Engagement in Business as Mission](#) – Jo Plummer (October 2015): BAM Global Think Tank Issue Report

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**BAM Global** is a network of networks operating among the business as mission community that exists to invigorate, strengthen and equip the global BAM movement. It has done so since 2002 by focusing on developing ‘intellectual capital’ (understanding, knowledge and shared learning) and ‘social capital’ (relationships and collaboration) in the movement. BAM Global provides forums for sharing knowledge in the business as mission community, including convening numerous consultations on BAM-related topics, resulting in a series of BAM Reports; and convening BAM Global Congress events in April 2013 and April 2020.