

**PART I:
ARAB WORLD CHURCH PLANTING: CONTEXT, STRATEGY AND
APPROACHES**

PRACTICES THAT SIGNIFICANTLY CORRELATE WITH
FRUITFULNESS AMONG PEOPLES OF THE ARAB
WORLD

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The authors are members of the Fruitful Practices Taskforce. This is a collaborative, multi-agency network of missiologists who are studying effective field practitioners and how God is working through them. Through this they identify and publicize practices that are demonstrably 'fruitful' in facilitating faith movements among Muslim peoples. They can be contacted at FruitfulPractices@gmail.com.

Abstract: Research from church planting field practitioners in the Arab Affinity Bloc demonstrates a relationship between fruitfulness in ministry and the following categories of Fruitful Practices: communication (including fluency, using the heart language, integrating learning preference into their strategy); encouragement of seekers and new believers; modelling life as a follower of Jesus; equipping new believers to share and defend their faith; and persistent prayer.

1. What are Fruitful Practices?

We define a Fruitful Practice as an activity that demonstrably promotes the emergence, vitality and multiplication of fellowships of Jesus-followers. We recognize that God draws people to himself, and it is ultimately his Spirit that does the work of conversion. He alone determines when people have crossed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Yet, for his own unfathomable reasons, God chooses to use us in the process and we can, as Paul warns in 1 Thessalonians, put out the Spirit's fire. The converse must also be true – we can work in harmony with the Spirit and his purposes.

We have set out an apologetic for this approach in other documents and refer the reader to these for an extended treatment of the subject (Allen 2008a, and *From Seed to Fruit*, chapters 7-12 in Woodberry 2008). In this paper, we seek to take a first look at some potential Fruitful Practices in the Arab Affinity Bloc. Johnstone (2007) defined this grouping of peoples as straddling North Africa and West Asia, covering 'most of the areas where Arabic is the dominant language.'¹

1. Patrick Johnson, 'Affinity Blocks and People Clusters: An Approach toward Strategic Insight and Mission Partnership,' *Mission Frontiers*, March-April 2007, p. 11.
(<http://missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2007/02/200702.htm>)



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The only contextual variable that was significantly related to this measure of fruitfulness was whether or not there was at least one person on the team fluent in the language of ministry.

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This is the beginning of a process, not its culmination. We have studied the expertise of a small number of fruitful workers in these fields. We are continuing the research, especially seeking to include types of workers who are not adequately represented in our original sample. To this end, we would be grateful for discussion, comment, elaboration, examples and critique of this attempt, in order to begin a collaborative exploration of the relationship between our activities and fruitfulness. (Send your comments and responses to the Seedbed editor and he will pass them on to the authors, or write to us directly at FruitfulPractices@gmail.com.)

In 2007, 300 practitioners – workers called to play their part in the formation of communities of Jesus followers among Muslims – from 34 agencies met at a consultation to explore specific practices that seem to contribute to fruitfulness. During this five-day event, we captured their lessons learned, insights and stories through surveys, ministry profiles, small group discussions and interviews. This paper focuses on results specific to the Arab Affinity Bloc.

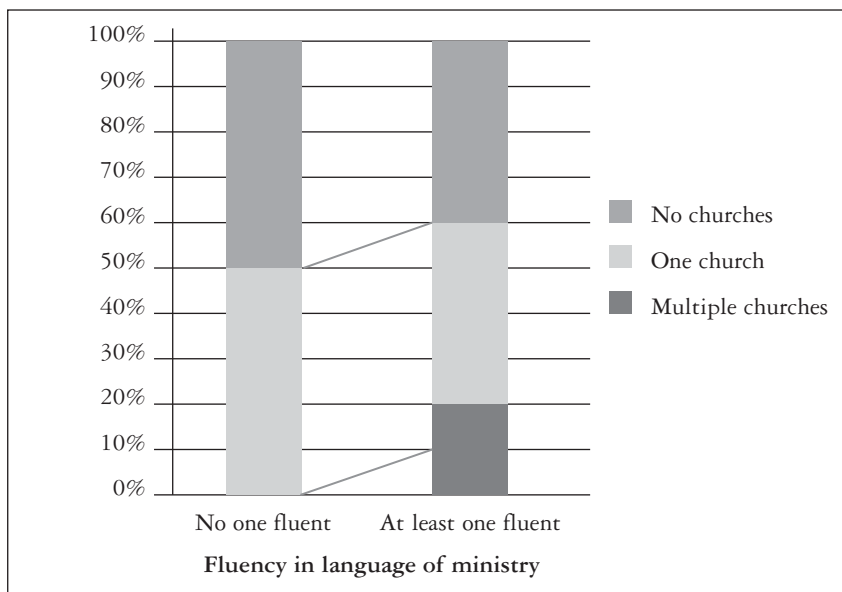


Figure 1: Percentage of participants reporting church planting fruitfulness. The first bar represents those that reported that no one on their team had achieved fluency in the language of ministry. The second bar indicates teams with at least one member fluent in the language of ministry.

2. The context of church planting

There were 59 present at the consultation working in the Arab Affinity Bloc. Thirty-eight of these completed a questionnaire relating to seventeen contextual factors affecting fruitfulness (e.g. age, gender, time on field).² All of these 38 workers had current (86%) or past field experience. The teams on which they served had a combined total of 425 years of field experience (*i.e.* the total number of years these teams had been present, not the total experience of the 38 individuals). The sample is biased towards younger (71% age 49 and below), male (79%) Americans (61%). However, participants also hailed from Latin America (13%) Europe (16%), Oceania (3%), East Asia (3%) and the Middle East (3%).

Participants were asked whether they had planted zero, one or multiple churches. Since the survey forms did not at this point offer a specific definition of 'church' this measure of fruitfulness is not easy to characterize. The only contextual variable that was significantly related to this measure of fruitfulness was whether or not there was at least one person on the team fluent in the language of ministry (figure 1).

At a later stage of the consultation, participants were asked to indicate how many fellowships they had established. For the purposes of this part of the study only, a fellowship was defined as three or more believers gathering together to follow Jesus. A total of 109 fellowships were reported established by the 38 participants. Of these 109 fellowships, 94% were established by teams that had:

- Incorporated the learning preference of a people group (oral vs. literate) into their team strategy
- Used the local language as opposed to the regional trade language
- At least one team member fluent in the ministry language

3. Fruitful Practices for Church Planting – Our Activities Matter

The total group of 59 participants were also asked (in a yes/no question) whether or not they practiced each of a list of 102 fruitful practices. Of those who answered the questions in Table 1³ positively, more than the statistically expected number had planted one or multiple churches. All who answered negatively to the Fruitful Practice statements in Table 1 had planted no more than one church. So, we can see that these practices are significantly correlated with fruitfulness among practitioners in the Arab Affinity Bloc.

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2. For complete details of the variables examined, see the report by The Knowledge Stewardship Team on the CD-ROM in *From Seed to Fruit* (Woodberry 2008)
 3. Cross-tabulation was used to examine significant relationships between fruitfulness and practice. Due to missing values, sample size for each test ranged from 30-48 participants. Significant differences of practice emerged among those who had planted zero, one or multiple churches for several of the fruitful practice statements (Chi-square tests, $p < 0.05$).



No.	Fruitful Practice Statement	Practice = No			Practice = Yes		
		# churches planted			# churches planted		
		0	1	M	0	1	M
43	He/she lives and works closely with believers and models the Christian life.	100%	0	0	32%	46%	22%
43	He/she equips believers to be able to answer basic apologetic questions.	67	33	0	22	56	26
43	They mobilize extensive, intentional and focused prayer (i.e. a large number of intercessors over a long period of time).	25	75	0	50	25	25
43	They are committed to regular sustained prayer, fasting and spiritual warfare.	80	20	0	33	39	28
43	They use Scripture as the textbook for leadership qualifications and training.	86	14	0	31	47	22
43	They encourage MBBs to share their testimony.	71	29	0	31	45	24
43	They use a variety of effective discipleship methods (one-on-one, in groups, etc.).	83	17	0	26	52	22
43	He/she encourages new believers to be involved in evangelism.	83	17	0	30	49	21
43	The fruitful MBB church has more than one leader.	N/A	100	0	N/A	52	48

Table 1: Fruitful Practices where there were significant differences in practice among levels of fruitfulness. Participants indicated whether or not they practiced a particular Fruitful Practice (yes/no) and whether or not they had planted zero (0), one (1) or multiple (M) churches. (Participants defined the term 'church' independently.) Numbers in the first column represent respondents to the question, numbers in the last six columns indicate percent of participants.

The above analysis examined each practice individually for its relationship with fruitfulness. It would also be helpful to understand if people who are more fruitful practiced Fruitful Practices more similarly to each other than to those

who are less fruitful. We were able to assess this for 20 Fruitful Practice statements on evangelism which were answered by 41 participants.⁴ The overall pattern is that those who were most fruitful were more similar to each other in their evangelism practices, as defined in our 20 questions, than to those who were not yet as fruitful.

The most fruitful workers in the Arab Affinity Bloc were more similar to each other in their church planting practices than to those less fruitful. These results suggest that there are some activities that God is blessing with more fruit than others. Of course, the results are only suggestive; the sample group was quite small. Additionally, we must be careful not to attribute causation to these factors. As in all correlation studies, the exact nature of the relationship cannot be specified. However, we believe that these results hint at what will prove to be a much more detailed and extensive set of Fruitful Practices that can be identified as having the potential to significantly affect church planting fruitfulness. As we continue to study the Lord's work in this and other Affinity Blocs, we will observe more of the various ways in which he is blessing our work.

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Clearly, a number of activities promote fruitfulness. Consultation participants were asked to evaluate 102 practices that previous research, by a number of different agencies, suggested were fruitful. Surveys completed at the consultation indicated that all of these practices were judged by participants to be important or important in impacting fruitfulness. Chapters 7-12 in *From Seed to Fruit*, (Woodberry, 2008) show that each of these practices promotes fruit in different ways in different contexts. However, some practices appear to be more common among those who are more fruitful. What are these practices?

To begin answering this question, we examined the occurrence of these practices among workers who have been a part of ministries of differing fruitfulness. This paper begins that process for a small sample of workers seeking to establish churches in the Arab Affinity Bloc. Naturally, a simple comparison such as the one presented here does not do justice to the multitude of factors which can impact fruitfulness. Yet a pattern emerges that gives us pointers and helps us to form new hypotheses to test and questions to ask. As we explored the data, we discovered that fruitful practitioners generally give more attention to certain practices than less fruitful practitioners. These four areas are communication, encouraging and modelling, equipping and prayer.

4. The similarity among participants is assessed using a similarity coefficient (Jaccard) which takes into account the answers to the 20 questions simultaneously (Zar 1984). This similarity matrix is then replicated in 2 and 3 dimensions using a process called multi-dimensional scaling, which plots the relative similarity among participants (Clark and Gorley 2006). Contact the authors if you would like more details on this analysis.



3.1. Communication

Fruitful teams communicate (1) with fluency, (2) in the heart language, and (3) in the learning preference of the audience (oral vs. literate). These three values have more weight than team longevity, team size, and other demographic features of the team or the people group among whom they minister. Themes of fruitfulness related to these three factors are also reported from quantitative and qualitative researchers working on the main dataset and interviews, (Allen 2008b, Burke 2008a, b, Chard and Chard 2008, Colgate 2008 and Greenlee and Wilson 2008, Adams et al. 2009). A team that had no members with high language skill, that did not take into account the learning style preferences of the local people in their team strategy and that ministered in the regional trade language, had only a seven percent probability that they had planted a church (The Knowledge Stewardship Team, 2008). Conversely, a team that had at least one person of high language skill, that incorporated learning preference into their strategy and that worked in the local language evidenced an 83 percent probability of having planted at least one church. About half who met these criteria (41 percent of all respondents) had planted multiple churches.

Furthermore, a number of researchers who have studied this data note that a combination of literate and oral approaches is often fruitful (Burke 2008a, Colgate 2008 and Greenlee and Wilson 2008). This could be due to the prestige of certain languages such as Arabic in Islam or adapting the common practice of using a copy of a book for reciting along with oral methods of discussing the recitation (DSM 2007 and Colgate 2008). Additionally, issues such as the topic and setting, language changes with globalization and diglossia (communities using two dialects) impact language choice (Burke 2008a and Anonymous 2008). Women report that working in the heart language was important more often than did men, perhaps due to fewer opportunities to learn a regional trade language (Greenlee and Wilson 2008 and Burke 2008b). Numerous other works indicate the benefit of orality approaches for functionally oral cultures (International Orality Network 2005 and LDH 2007, for example).

3.2. Encouraging and Modelling

More fruitful teams tend to encourage new believers to be involved in evangelism, and specifically, to share their testimony. The benefits of this approach are obvious and have been noted by other authors (Greenlee and Love 2005). The reluctance on the part of some new believers is understandable. In some cultures, it may be easier for new believers to share their faith with someone outside their family.⁵ However, this would tend towards inhibiting the implanting of the Gospel within social networks, a strategy which has been

5. Personal communication from Dan Sinclair

theorized to be more fruitful in the long run (Bell 1974), with recent data tending to support this hypothesis for all workers at the 2007 consultation (Adams et al. 2009, Gray and Gray 2009). It has also been reported that fear of sharing their faith has often been transmitted by the worker themselves (Gupta 2005). Reporting on global data from the consultation, not just from the Arab Affinity Bloc, Greenlee and Wilson (2008) report that women were less likely to encourage MBBs to share their testimony than men.

The importance of working closely with believers and modelling the Christian life was highlighted by Becker and Simuyu (2008). They reported, 'The availability of the messenger to walk with the MBB, sharing in his or her struggles as much as possible, is one of the most fruitful activities in the discipleship process. Discipleship is not just giving content. It is relational' (p. 127). They assert that practitioners need to be humble enough to learn and admit fault, and they need to be available enough to model a Jesus-centred lifestyle.

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3.3. Equipping

More fruitful teams use Scripture as their textbook for leadership qualification and training. This equips new believers with Scripture as a foundational base. Adams and Adams (2008) report, though, that it requires significant cultural understanding to apply the Bible in an appropriate manner. This Fruitful Practice then is synergistic, perhaps significantly undermined without the Fruitful Practices focused on clear communication of scripture and the gospel. As we might expect, teams that use a variety of discipleship methods tend to be more fruitful than those that do not. Interestingly, equipping believers to answer basic apologetic questions was fruitful. We cannot determine from this survey whether or not this is more beneficial because it helped MBBs to retain their faith in the face of counter arguments or because it was effective in evangelism.

3.4. Prayer

All Christians know that we should pray. Analysis of interviews reported elsewhere (Daniels 2008) show that this was a vital aspect of most fruitful teams' ministry. Daniels writes '...prayer surrounded all Fruitful Practices like air surrounds our bodies.' He concludes, 'Prayer is truly a very Fruitful Practice, it quite literally saturated the narratives I reviewed, and this was usually a very active kind of prayer, workers acting as if they truly expected God to hear them and intervene.'⁶ Interestingly, there were mixed results for those workers who

6. If you would like a copy of Daniels' study and its findings on the role of prayer, please email the authors and we will send the PDF document to you.

We must do more than pray, but it is unlikely that we will produce lasting fruit without praying.

mobilized extensive, international and focused prayer, such as a widely publicized year of prayer for their country or people. Half of the teams that reported that they do such activities had not planted a church; only a quarter of those reporting that they don't do this activity had not planted a church. However, all who reported planting multiple churches had been engaged in prayer in this way. Daniels (2008) also reports extensively on the use of prayer as an evangelistic activity. Adams et al. (2009) indicated that prayer was one of seven fruitful factors that characterized participants at the consultation as a whole. Clearly we know we should pray, but it can seem optional or sometimes perfunctory. We must do more than pray, but it is unlikely that we will produce lasting fruit without praying.

3.5. Multiple Leadership

One further factor arises from this study. Workers who reported that the fellowships they had helped to plant had more than one leader tended to have planted more churches than workers who did not report multiple leaders. Sinclair (2006) and others have given a number of examples of the importance of a plurality of leaders. The data in the Arab Affinity Bloc concur that this characteristic is associated with more fruitful teams.

Conclusions and Application

How can you apply these findings to your ministry? We suggest that you take some time to reflect on the areas we have identified as particularly influencing fruitfulness. Are you communicating in a way that your audience can best understand? In what ways are you encouraging and modelling for the believers you work with? Are the believers you work with being equipped well and in areas that will lead to fruitfulness? Are you spending enough time praying or perhaps too much time mobilizing prayer? We would also encourage you, as you might imagine, to read our article entitled 'Seven Fruitful Factors' (Adams et al. 2009). In this article a number of themes are explored in narrative form. Perhaps some of the themes not touched on in this current article, such as storying, reputation, scripture use and intentional reproduction, might be helpful for your specific situation.

Whether or not it is the success of one person, 59 people (as in this study) or 1000, often we look to successful examples of ministry and try to replicate what others have done. We hope you will not do that with this research! We strongly advocate reflective practice. Carefully consider what others have done, their relative success and then prayerfully apply these results to your own situation. The Fruitful Practices identified in this study could benefit your ministry, they

have for others. However, we must carefully consider the specific situation to which they are applied and modify those aspects that are unlikely to fit. Experiment, innovate and test these ideas. They are clearly preliminary, but full of potential for positively impacting the fruitfulness of your ministry.

Clearly, there is need for much more research. Our hope is that you will join us in this process. Do you have a story that illustrates the fruitfulness of any of these principles? Others can learn from your experience. Perhaps you have tried one of these practices and found it unfruitful. Unless you share your experience, others are likely to spend valuable time and energy repeating unfruitful practices (Adams 2009). We look forward to interacting with you as we watch the Father and discover the Fruitful Practices that he is using through us to draw believers from a Muslim background to himself.

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