Attrition-Resilience Interview Summary:
Ranked Responses
Eric and Laura Adams, March 2018

We began our study of resilience and attrition of team leaders in cross-cultural, church planting settings by seeking a way to frame the issues. To do this, we interviewed about 40 members of our community who have been field leaders and/or in roles mentoring field leaders. We asked each of them: From your observations, which factors, that you have control over, contribute to the resilience or attrition of field leaders?

This is a summary of main themes emerging from their responses. On balance, we have focused on factors contributing to *resiliency*.

Attrition factors, for this study, undermine a field leader's ability to pursue their calling, eventually leading them to leave the organization or ministry.

Resilience factors, for this study, help field leaders to 'spring back' from challenges, setbacks, obstacles, etc. to continue pursuing their calling (whether as team leaders or by shifting to other roles).

<u>Instructions</u>
In the sections below, there will be statements in a table, with a column of light blue boxes to the left of each paragraph. As you read these paragraphs, take a moment to evaluate the importance of stated concept, principle or idea to TL resilience and/or attrition of team leaders in our ASC, based on your experience and observations.

Then please weight the paragraph with a number, 1-5, in the box, scaled from 1 being 'not important' 2 'somewhat important'; 3 'important'; 4 'very important' and 5 being 'critically important'. Put 0 for 'unsure, don't know'.

We've turned on 'track changes' in Word, so you can edit any of the paragraphs with suggestions to improve or refine the statements. Please feel free to insert comments in any part of the paper.

Thanks. We'll process your feedback and send you the results.

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Resilient team leaders have a strong sense of calling. A sense of calling, or deep conviction that God has asked them to do this work, was cited often as a key contributor to TL resilience. This sense of calling helps team leaders to face the rigors of field life when other, lesser motivations fail. A distinction was often made between "calling" and "career".

4.80	**Resilient team leaders consider that calling is fundamental;** careers and placement serve their calling.
4.25	**Team leaders who work out of a sense of "driven-ness" are less resilient.** Those who work from their own strength seem to be far more vulnerable to burnout than those who work out of a sense of calling.
4.50	**Team leaders whose spouses have complementary callings are more resilient.** Many leaders talked about the importance of husbands and wives having a similar commitment to calling. Sometimes when both do not share this commitment, they are not able to stay the course.
4.00	**Team members who do not share their TLs calling contribute to team or TL attrition.** Team members also need a personal sense of calling; they cannot ride long relying on their TL's calling. This undermines TL resilience and/or leading to high turnover of team members.
4.32	**TLs who have a "short term" mindset are less resilient.**

It is mission critical for team leaders to gain leadership skills. The organization gives each field team leader authority for decision-making for his sphere of influence. Because of this these skills impact resilience and effectiveness. Leadership skills acquired by resilient TLs include:

4.05	Ability to **articulate their apostolic vision** in ways that motivate team members.
4.56	Ability to set **clear expectations and boundaries**.
4.55	Ability to **facilitate healthy relationships** among team members.
4.45	Ability to **encourage** and build up their team.
4.25	Ability to **delegate to gifts** of team members.
4.44	Ability to **give authority appropriate to responsibilities** which have been delegated.
4.35	Ability to **follow clear protocols for conflict resolution.**
4.50	Ability to **live as humble disciples** of Jesus.
3.95	Ability to **network with other like-minded leaders** in their area.
4.20	Ability to **cultivate positive reputation** (for self and team) in the local community.

Team leaders who welcome mentoring become more resilient.

4.26	**Resilient TLs gather a network of mentors.** Leadership is lonely, and the context of many of our fields are harsh, so the leaders who did well were the ones who were part of peer networks, and/or had coaches, mentors and overseers they knew and were known by. From these relationships they draw encouragement, consultation, cross-pollination of ideas, correction and community.

4.85	**When pre-existing character weaknesses are addressed by mentors, TLs develop resilience.** A lesson learned repeatedly was that "competence should never excuse character." This is especially true for people with capable, charismatic or "shiny" personalities, who may be tempted to use their gifts to compensate for or hide underlying character problems. Gatekeepers (e.g. those in the ATL process) for the organization need to allow those with gifts of discernment to help them spot aspiring leaders with this kind of blind spot, so they can be mentored in transformative ways.
3.88	**An initial probation period can help develop resilient TLs.** Many interviewees felt the new two-year probationary time for ATLs, before granting TL status, was a positive step forward (the idea originally dates back to Greg Livingstone's process for TLs). This allows the sponsor's judgement to be supplemented by evidence-based criteria (for example, evaluated against factors in the TL PRE) over the two-year period.
4.39	**When TLs are given graceful ways to move out of the TL role to other roles appropriate for their gifting and season of ministry, they gain resilience.** Not everyone aspiring to be a team leader should be one. If a TL does not do well during the two-year probationary time, they are helped to find roles as team members or leave the field with honour. *TL status is difficult to remove once it is granted.* When a TL needs to relinquish his/her role and is resistant to this, there is extra trauma and disruption for the TL, the team and the ministry.
3.50	**TLs functioning within multiple-leadership models are more resilient.** TLs who are part of leadership teams find that this has allowed a mixture of gifting for field efforts. This leadership team might be a set of leaders who share responsibility (often there is a 'first among peers' personality in the team), or a leader supported by 2-3 "elders", who process decisions with him/her.

Healthy team life contributes to team leader resilience. Qualities of healthy team life that a resilient TL will cultivate include:

4.20	**Bonding and close relationships** through a common apostolic vision.
4.00	Use of **social events** like meals, game nights and fellowship **to strengthen relationships, encourage and build one another up**.
4.60	Team members **share burdens**.
4.80	Team members **know and are known by** each other, accept one another in **humility**, and **respect** the contribution each member brings.
4.78	**Expectations** between the leader and members are **clearly articulated, understood and equalized.**
4.35	Team members **recognize the gifting in** the team. Team leader **honours and delegates** to those gifts. Recognition that fruitfulness in apostolic task comes from full engagement of gifts, skills, talents and experience of all team members. Identify and work out of the team's strengths.
4.70	Team members **follow protocols for handling conflicts**. No areas are considered "taboo." Honest and transparent communication; confession, then giving and receiving forgiveness. "Conflict reveals who we really are."
3.24	Team is **multi-generational teams**; energy of youth, life experience of older.

4.00	Team members **talk through and challenge assumptions and prejudices**, to move beyond cultural conditionings and find underlying commonality as God's people called to an apostolic task. Team embraces a Kingdom agenda as opposed to culture-bound biases and agendas.
4.53	Team **engages in corporate spiritual disciplines** together – word, worship, prayer, fasting, etc.

Personal Traits contribute to a team leader's resiliency. These include:

4.58	**Self-awareness**. TL has a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses he/she brings to the field. Often this awareness has come through trials and challenges previously faced.
4.84	Ability, willingness and desire to **bond with team** and enter healthy relationships and resolve conflict responsibly.
4.84	TL has the **spiritual maturity to take responsibility** for and address personal character flaws, addictions, moral failings, even sin when field life reveals them in the context of team and/or ministry. Jack Miller: "Going overseas pours Miracle-Gro on your sin"
4.95	TL has the **maturity, discipline and ability to care for self**: physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.
4.75	TL has a **deep desire to participate in a new culture**, this motivates continuous language learning and relationship building in the host community.
4.70	TL has both **mental and emotional flexibility** to adapt to changing situations.
4.30	TL takes adequate time to **recruit and build an effective support network** to provide prayer, finances and a sending community, with depth of relationships.
3.80	TL **regularly communicates with support network** about the realities of field life and apostolic calling.
4.18	TL has **good closure when leaving home culture**, thus entering field work whole-heartedly.
4.68	TL has the **humility to always be learning** and accepting new ideas; wants to serve and learn from others.
4.53	TL is willing to **leave their home culture fully**, not allow distant relationships to eclipse or exclude local relationships, and not holding onto entitlements or status of that home culture.
4.80	TL has adequate **self-discipline to persevere** in the face of challenges and adversity.
4.45	TL has **humour** and the ability to laugh at self.
4.95	TL **lives out of identity in Christ** and that this calling belongs to God, He will fulfil it.

Family Traits contribute to a team leader's resilience. Healthy family traits include:

4.84	The TL **promotes healthy marriages** among the team as foundation for ministry.

	Husband and wife work to maintain the sanctity of marriage and nurture loving, supportive relationships.
4.39	The TL ensures that **no family members are isolated or insulated from the host culture**. This often means special accommodations must be made by family members or team for the moms and children to learn language and culture so they can build friendships in the host culture.
4.42	The TL ensures that **children within team families feel safe and know they are loved**. If children are doing well, the families will often be doing well.
4.32	The TL **promotes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health** for all family members on team.
4.42	The TL **encourages team families to proactively plan realistic educational options** for children through secondary school.
4.16	The TL encourages team members to **plan for the different seasons of family life** – from pregnancy and birth through children leaving home. This is especially important for wives/mothers.
4.25	The TL **protects team members and team from effects of moral failings** such as addictions (e.g. pornography) or destructive character traits like excessive anger, shame, fear, need to control, etc.
4.32	The TL encourages all family members on team to pursue activities and attitudes that promote **healthy adaptions well to cross-cultural life**, with a result of general happiness, even joy.

Team leaders who develop self-awareness become increasingly resilient. Many field workers are unprepared for impact cross-cultural ministry can have on their sense of identity: the 'shock of self-discovery'. Aspects of self-awareness include:

4.00	The TL is **prepared for the identity shift** that takes place when learning to live in a new cultural setting.
4.21	The TL recognizes that the stresses encountered while **adjusting to a new culture will often reveal one's 'shadow side':** parts of one's personality which have been suppressed or ignored previously. The TL seeks strategies and resources to help with this.
4.47	The TL has **mental and emotional flexibility to** understand a new culture and worldview on its terms, rather than viewing it only through the lens of the home culture.
4.53	The TL **has a heart level, experiential understanding of identity rooted in Christ** rather than in jobs, roles, status, wealth, position or other non-Biblical measure of worth.
4.60	The TL **recognizes that God's primary work is to transform the character and purposes of his people**, so that they become more like Jesus. This truth helps them constructively work through challenge, adversity, crisis, suffering and sacrifice.

Team leaders who mature spiritually increase in resilience. In our **faith** as followers of Jesus, we have immense – often untapped – resources to help us thrive and live out lives of fruitfulness in the apostolic task. Resilience comes from:

4.06	The TL recognises all three dimensions of life in Jesus: **Truth, Power and Allegiance**. See [Contextualization and Spiritual Power - Kraft]().
4.95	The TL practices the **Presence of God in daily life**, with a mindful attitude of prayer.
4.65	The TL is **aware of spiritual realities**, including warfare over souls.
4.45	The TL **mobilizes a network of prayer supporters** for ministry, providing regular specific requests and updating them on specific answers.
4.90	The TL **practices spiritual disciplines that nurture responsiveness to God**, to sense him more clearly in quiet and live increasingly in Joy.
4.79	The TL **recognises that God is always working *in* us, to deepen us and our discipleship**. This work is often a critical preliminary step to working *through* us for his purposes in our field.
3.81	The TL is aware of the **natural progression of spiritual development** (e.g. [Critical Journey]())
4.42	The TL **allows Jesus to shine through his/her life while living in obedience of faith** (obedience is God's 'Love Language', e.g. John 14:15). Personal discipleship is considered a necessary foundation to discipling others.
4.68	The **TL recognises that the Gospel is for now** (not after death). Allegiance to Jesus (as King) and his Kingdom produces healthy, productive relationships and communities in the present – the abundant life.
4.55	The TL **experiences a Faith which taps into a perspective greater than how current circumstances appear.**
4.56	The **TL is motivated by purpose, hope, significance in the apostolic task**, obeying the Great Commission.

Some organizational adjustments may increase resiliency of team leaders. Many interviewees commented on changes in the organization's systems and structures which might lead to better retention of team leaders and build resilience on the field. For example:

4.39	**Sometimes inadequate screening of personnel** contributed to situations where the resulting on-field problems significantly drained already stretched time, emotional, relational resources of field people; and distracted from ministry itself.
4.25	**Adequate screening that may increase resilience includes evidence of spiritual maturity.** Interviewees often said we need more candidates who understand themselves, demonstrate spiritual maturity, whose character had been tested (maybe in pre-field programs like Studio, Immerge and TOAG), and have healthy boundaries. "We need to see them interacting with other people, observation requires relational closeness and proximity; need honest people close to candidates who can give candid input."
4.56	**Adequate screening that may decrease attrition includes awareness of "yellow flag" factors.** For example, the one sending base says "no" to people with:

	indications of child abuse, psychotic personality signs, indication of arrogance and need to control, unteachable spirits, immaturity, blame-shifting. When there are multiple small 'yellow flag' issues, with suspicion of other issues, they say "no." If there is no church recommendation. If the candidate cannot affirm the statement of faith. They pause the acceptance of candidates with significant 'yellow flags', and specify criteria for moving forward. Only 30% of people paused in this way end up making it to the field.
3.88	**Improved communication between field and candidates during recruitment may contribute to choices leading to more resilient TLs.** Communication between field workers and candidates during the recruiting process or early in the candidate process may help aspiring TLs discern whether they are ready for this role. SALT 'Masala talks' are one good example. "One year before leaving, people need to be engaged with reality of being on field." e.g. DSB and SSB examples of working with candidates two years. A few suggested that quality field workers recruited and who fit the above profile, would through these discussions, attract other candidates and start a virtuous recruitment circle; e.g. like attracts like.
4.25	**When mentors link with all field members, this contributes to more resilient teams and TLs.** TLOs, mentors and coaches should consistently engage with all members of a team, not just the TL, to gain a more complete picture of team life. "On balance support the TL, but if there is evidence that he is not being a good TL he needs to hear that and the issues challenged."
4.53	**Pre-field training addressing suffering can contribute to more resilient TLs.** We need a much better theology of suffering to help sending networks, from the West especially, to better inform the risk-adverse' and suffering-adverse attitudes in those sending cultures. Important to have pre-field conversations on the difficulty of the places we are sending people: visa issues, little schooling options, difficult living, violence, conflict. Help them process the realities of this, how they and their family can count the cost and have realistic expectations.
4.17	**Adherence to tested protocols of the candidate process can contribute to more resilient TLs and teams.** Many problems on the field have come from TLs insisting that team member candidates bypass candidate training and processing and come directly to the field to join their teams. This should only happen in very exceptional circumstances.
4.50	**"Competence does not excuse character."** Sending and Field leaders need to be wiser about charismatic individuals who use their personalities to compensate for blind spots and character weaknesses. We need to be consistent in our conviction "Don't promise things too early."
4.17	**Adjusting criteria for evaluating Sending Bases can contribute to resilient TLs.** Sending Bases should not be evaluated or measured – objectively by the ASC or subjectively by themselves – by merely the number of TLs they send out. A much better measure would be the number of TLs they send that successfully navigate the two-year probationary period before gaining TL status.
3.67	**"Newcomers don't have the wisdom or experience to write a VSP."** Realistic expectations of new TLs can contribute to TL resilience.
4.31	**Honesty in recruiting.** Both candidates and field workers are being disappointed by current process: candidates are finding field realities different from the recruitment pitch they might have responded to; field teams find candidates not

	measuring up to what they understood the sending base to be sending.
4.24	**Better synergy between recruiters and overseers in the ATL process can contribute to TL resilience.** There is an ongoing tension between people who want to get people on the field and those who care for them when they get to the field. Often the feeling that leadership anoints them prematurely, before they are ready to be on the field. We have not used the wisdom of many counsellors/eyes well; several cases when pre-field processing suggested ATL not be given TL status, advice was ignored and this created many problems. Need better 'due diligence' protocols.
4.18	**Protocol which ensures that the "important questions" are asked can contribute to TL resilience.** Often the final opportunity to prevent people from leaving the field is missed (e.g. because the topic is 'taboo') because the most important questions are not asked. "I've observed part of attrition comes from not discerning what is true in a difficult situation."
3.79	**Better monitoring of attrition (exit interviews) can help us learn more about how to promote resilience.** All SBs should consider a standardized set of questions for exit interviews, like those of the PREMAP study, but especially tailored to our unique community.
3.88	**Awareness of cultural theological weaknesses can contribute to TL resilience.** We need to reflect on and possibly deconstruct the western Christianity many of our people come out from. Help candidates explore the Gospel focus on the Kingdom of God, rather than sin management. "Saved and going to Heaven is nowhere in the New Testament" – Tom Wright.
4.39	**Increased conflict resolution skills can contribute to TL resilience.** While John Shindeldecker's *Peace Pursuit* material is very good, we need to do conflict resolution better. John's material, for example, should have greater currency and be applied more consistently.
3.95	**Facilitating field roles for senior members can contribute to TL resilience.** Need to validate field positions for older mentors to live with teams on the field, so that their life experience and maturity can become a resource for younger field workers and families.
4.16	**Proactive pastoral checkups can contribute to TL resilience.** Need more proactive pastoral care of field workers – like a regular 'check-up'. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Burnout, for example, can be caught much earlier on. If left to fester, disappointment leads to discouragement, which leads to despair.
3.94	**Graceful transitions out of TL roles can contribute to the field member's resilience.** "Think about healthy attrition – help those not doing well on field to leave honourably, not making a big thing of it. Like honourable discharge from military service."
3.56	**Alignment between field and sending narratives can contribute to TL resilience.** "Sometimes there is an unhealthy commitment to dysfunctional narratives that go on longer than they should. For example, the focus on MUPGs stopped recruitment to the Mideast, so we had to bypass this and recruit from another angle, sometimes outside SBs. this was not helpful."
3.81	**Awareness of personal agendas can contribute to TL resilience.** "The 'fresh fire', fad of the month. People come with a formula to do the job quickly. This proves to

	be a distraction. Our task is straight-forward, new fads usually don't pan out; the main purpose of 'fads' is, often, the personal *fame* a few people get from promoting the fad." We do a great disservice to our ASC when we, leaders and gatekeepers, encourage or allow individuals pursuing self-aggrandisement or unhealthy ambition into positions of influence in our community.
4.22	**Prioritizing langua-culture learning before engaging in business strategies can contribute to TL resilience.** "People going in to do business should do 2 years of language learning and market research (are locals doing it? Why? Why not? What unique thing am I bringing? Why would people want to work with foreigners rather than locals?)."
4.31	**Greater awareness of match between the "toughness" of a certain field and the capacity of the TL can contribute to resilience.** "We must find an appropriate field for candidates – those who can handle tough fields, place them there. Others go to less tough environments, as there are places for them".
3.53	**Organization structure in general contributes to TL resilience.** "Having a structure like our organization's gives field people confidence. Led by former field people who have seen things happen." – Latino leaders.
4.45	**Commitment to debriefing and support of TLs in transition can contribute to resilience.** People often do better in second term, and good comes out of failed teams. Debriefing helps people understand what happened and return to field and continue calling.
3.50	**Awareness of self versus community agendas can contribute to resilience.** Many of our narratives are still too 'me' oriented; field reality is 'us' oriented, the ASC.