

Transformational Leadership Approach for Sustainable Christian Mission Engagement in the Community

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Abstract

The transformational leadership approach emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire and persuade individuals towards a shared vision, fostering a sense of commitment and empowerment within the organization. In the context of Christian missions, this leadership style is particularly relevant as it aligns with the principles of servant leadership and the mission to bring about positive change in communities. Transformational Leadership in Christian Mission Engagement involves four crucial components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. By inspiring and empowering individuals, leaders can foster a sense of ownership and commitment among team members, leading to increased motivation and dedication to the mission. Moreover, sustaining a transformational leadership approach requires ongoing effort and vigilance to ensure that the values and vision remain central to the mission's activities. Therefore, the transformational leadership approach is instrumental in driving sustainable Christian mission engagement. By embodying fundamental principles such as inspiration, empowerment, and individualized support, leaders can cultivate a culture of commitment and resilience within their organizations. While challenges exist, the potential for a positive impact on mission outcomes makes transformational leadership an essential consideration for those involved in Christian missions.

Keywords: Transformation, Leadership, Sustainable, Christian Mission, Community, Engagement.

Introduction

[James MacGregor](#) defined transformational leadership as a leadership style that involves inspiring and motivating followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and develop their potential.¹ He distinguished transformational leadership from transactional leadership, emphasizing the importance of leaders who inspire and motivate their followers to attain higher levels of performance. As affirmed by A. B., Aaron Kauppi, et al., transformational leadership is defined as a leadership method that causes change in persons and social systems. In its perfect form, it creates valued and positive change in the followers with the end objective of developing followers into leaders.² The transformational leadership approach has garnered noteworthy consideration for its emphasis on rousing and enabling adherents to attain extraordinary outcomes.

Unfortunately, the number of missionaries in the field continues to deteriorate because a noteworthy portion of the church no longer believes that it is necessary to fulfil the decree from Christ to convey the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ to the ends of the world, so sustainable Christian mission engagement in the community is of paramount importance as it aligns with the core values and teachings of Christianity, which emphasize love, compassion, and service to others. This form of engagement seeks to address the holistic needs of individuals and communities, including physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, while also promoting environmental stewardship and social justice.³ Furthermore, sustainable Christian mission engagement promotes environmental stewardship by encouraging responsible resource management and conservation practices within the community. By integrating environmental

¹ James. M. Burns *Leadership*. (New York. Harper & Row, 1978), <https://www.langston.edu/basic-content-files>, Langston University.

² A. B., Aaron Kauppi, et al. *TransformationalLeadership*. chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpeglclefindmkaj/<https://www.langston.edu/sites/default/files/basic-content-files/TransformationalLeadership.pdf>.

³ Ulrich Nitschke and Bennet Gabriel “Partnership in Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD): a Global and Inclusive Partnership to Harness the Positive Impact of Religion in Development and Humanitarian Assistance” In *Toward a Shared, Sustainable Future: The Role of Religion, Values and Ethics* Edited by Zhuo Xinping, et al., Published by The Amity Foundation 2018: 37-49.

sustainability into mission work, Christian organizations can contribute to the overall well-being of the community while also addressing global concerns such as climate change and ecological degradation. By actively engaging in social justice efforts, Christian missions can work towards creating a more just and equitable society that reflects the principles of love, compassion, and solidarity found in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Characteristics of Transformational Leadership

In 1985, Bernard M. Bass expanded on Burns' ideas to advance the [Bass Transformational Leadership Theory](#), comprising four main characteristics of transformational leadership.⁴ These are:

1. Intellectual Stimulation

Annette Towler defines intellectual stimulation as the level to which transformational leaders contest assumptions, take risks and ask for followers' ideas. Transformational leaders intellectually stimulate followers' innovative and creative efforts by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways.⁵ They recognize followers through stimulation, innovation and creativity and challenge the "this is the way we have always done things" mentality, accept the status quo, and challenge the assumptions of even seasoned leaders. They encourage this same Spirit in their followers. It means emphasizing new experiences, new opportunities, and creative ways of thinking.⁶ By emphasizing opportunities for growth and learning, rather than focusing on the results of efforts, the transformational leader removes the

⁴ Bernard M. Bass, *Transformational Leadership Theory*, 1985, <https://www.leadership-central.com/bass-transformational-leadership-theory.html>.

⁵ Annette Towler, *The qualities of transformational leaders and what distinguishes them from transactional leaders*, 2019 <https://www.ckju.net/en/dossier/qualities-transformational-leaders-and-what-distinguishes-them-transactional-leaders>

⁶ Israel Sánchez-Cardona, Marisa Salanova Soria and Susana Llorens-Gumbau, *Leadership Intellectual Stimulation and Team Learning: the Mediating Role of Team Positive Affect*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Universitas Psychologica, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy17-1.list>.

“fear factor” from his or her followers, allowing them to stop learning, finding and acting on opportunities instead of taking advantage of them. Finally, followers are encouraged to try new approaches, and their ideas are not criticized when they differ from the leader’s.⁷ Transformational leadership focused on intellectual stimulation is a leadership model that, when applied, leads to success for healthcare teams and organizations.

2. Individual Consideration

One of the critical transformational leadership traits is the ability to convey a sense of the larger culture to the individual, giving followers a feeling of ownership in the organization’s goals and independence in the system. Transformational leaders do not command ideas from a bubble and then leave it to followers to carry them out. They are concerned with the professional development of followers and nurture positive relationships with them. This comprises keeping lines of communication open, attending to the individual needs of followers, mentoring them and recognizing each person’s unique contributions.⁸ They lead by communicating a clear vision and creating an enabling environment where seasoned followers are trusted to make decisions in their assigned areas. All followers are encouraged to think creatively to find new solutions to longstanding challenges. In transformational leadership, leaders form relationships with their team members so that they can learn about their needs and provide individualized support. It is helpful to recognize the accomplishments of team members to encourage them and provide motivation. Giving specific praise may impart ownership of their responsibilities and help employees realize their value to their team.

3. Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders use inspirational motivation to create a convincing vision of the future, communicate high expectations, and inspire their followers to surpass their self-interest for the

⁷ Paul Breaux, *EMS Leadership Part 3: Intellectual Stimulation Transformational Leadership in EMS*. <https://www.hmpgloballearningnetwork.com/site/emsworld/article/10319364/ems-leadership-part-3-intellectual-stimulation-transformational-leadership-ems> 08/17/2010.

⁸ Indeed Editorial Team. *The 4 Key Components of Transformational Leadership*. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/key-components-of-transformational-leadership>, 2023.

good of the organization or society. This leadership approach is characterized by the leader's ability to articulate a clear and appealing vision, foster a sense of purpose and meaning in work, and provide encouragement and support to help their followers overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential. Inspirational motivation involves fostering enthusiasm, optimism, and commitment among followers by providing a compelling vision and setting high expectations.⁹ Motivation to succeed is not based on fear but is inspired by examples. Transformational leaders set extraordinary standards and expectations for themselves, then set an example for their employees and the entire organization. Their actions instill the same sense of passion they feel in their followers, whether it is for a project, a goal, or the organization's larger vision. Employees now have a strong sense of purpose and a "mission mindset" to achieve their goals.

4. Idealized Influence

Idealized influence refers to the leader's capability to serve as an example for their followers, demonstrating high ethical and moral standards and gaining the trust, reverence, and admiration of their team members. Transformational leaders who exhibit idealized influence are able to instill a sense of purpose and vision in their followers, leading by example and setting high standards for performance and behavior. The foundation of this influence is trust and respect.¹⁰ By doing so, they inspire their followers to align with the organization's goals and values, fostering a sense of unity and commitment within the team. Furthermore, leaders who demonstrate idealized influence are able to build robust relationships with their followers based on mutual respect and trust.

Sustainable Christian Mission Engagement in the Community

The nineteenth century was a great century for Protestant missionary work. Christian missionaries operated as 'agents of change' through their evangelistic and philanthropic activities towards the

⁹ Arnold B. Bakker, Jørn Hetland, Olav Kjellevoid Olsen, Roar Espevik "Daily transformational leadership: A source of inspiration for follower performance?" *European Management Journal* Volume 41, Issue 5, October 2023,700-708.

¹⁰ Zdaniuk, Agnes, Bobocel, D. Ramona, "The role of idealized influence leadership in promoting workplace forgiveness" *Elsevier Science; The Leadership Quarterly*, #5, 26, 2015, 863-877.

advancement of education and economic mobilization. Christianity, as a `social religion`, formed institutions for the improvement of society.¹¹ This approach emphasizes the integration of faith-based values with sustainable development principles, seeking to address the needs of communities while also preserving the natural environment and promoting social justice. Sustainable Christian mission engagement encompasses a wide range of activities, including evangelism, humanitarian aid, community development, and environmental stewardship, all conducted in a manner that respects the dignity and autonomy of the communities being served.

Furthermore, sustainable Christian mission engagement involves careful consideration of the long-term impact of mission activities on both the local community and the natural environment.¹² By integrating these principles into their mission work, Christian individuals and organizations can contribute to the well-being of communities in a way that is both effective and sustainable.

Biblical Foundations for Christian Mission Engagement

The biblical foundations for Christian mission engagement are rooted in the teachings of the Bible, which emphasize the importance of spreading the message of God's love and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to all people.¹³ The word mission itself emanates from the Latin verb *missio*, which means "to send. One of the most renowned passages in the Bible speaks to this mission: The motive behind the divine action of redemption crystallized in John 3:16 lies in the deed of God in sending His Son into the world. Verse 34 exposes more about that mission: "For he whom God has sent pronounces the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. It is Jesus Christ, and He was sent to speak the words of God and give the Holy Spirit without measure. Jesus also speaks in His High Priestly Prayer of communicating the words of God and of having been

¹¹ Santha K. Jetty, *Historical Models of Engagement to Teach Mission in the Complex Public Arena* <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1159&context=firstfruitpapers> DOI: 10.7252/Paper.0000322.

¹² Fabien Martinez, Ken Peattie and Diego Vazquez-Brust. *Faith in the Future: On a Mission to Integrate Sustainability into Management Theory and Practice*. (Published by Elsevier, 2020) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016328720301440>.

¹³ Dorothy Boorse, *A Biblical Basis for Christian Engagement An Excerpt from "Loving the Least of These: Addressing a Changing Environment"* <https://www.nae.org/biblical-basis-christian-engagement>, August 27, 2022.

sent by the Father (John 17:8).¹⁴ The biblical foundation for missions is the Word of God pronounced in divine authority; it is the decree of Christ.

The concept of mission in Christianity is derived from the Great Commission, a directive given by Jesus Christ to his disciples to go and make a foundational principle for Christian mission engagement, guiding believers to share their faith with others and partake in events that promote spiritual growth and social justice. The apostle Paul, in particular, played a noteworthy role in disseminating the message of Christianity to various regions, emphasizing the need for believers to be ambassadors and disciples of all nations. This command is to serve Christ and to disseminate the gospel with others (2 Corinthians 5:20). The Epistles Paul's letters further elaborate on the theological foundations for missions. This encapsulates the inclusive nature of the Christian mission—open to all people regardless of ethnic background.

Furthermore, the biblical foundations for Christian mission engagement extend beyond evangelism to encompass holistic ministry that addresses physical, emotional, and social needs. It is essential to delve further into the Scriptures, which are central to understanding the Christian call to missions, in order to explore the biblical foundations for Christian mission engagement.¹⁵ This exploration is grounded in the belief that the Bible provides the primary framework and mandate for Christian mission activities. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) One of the most foundational scriptures for Christian mission is found in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus instructs His followers to go and make disciples of all nations. This passage, known as the Great Commission, serves as a clear mandate for Christian evangelism and discipleship. Passages like Psalm 96:3 “Declare his glory among the nations, his extraordinary deeds among all peoples and prophets like Isaiah envision a future where all nations will stream to Zion to learn God's ways (Isaiah 2:2-4). This universal vision sets a precedent for understanding God's concern for all

¹⁴ Sproul, R.C. *The Biblical Basis for Mission*. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/biblical-basis-missions>, August 31, 2015.

¹⁵ Piper, John. *Biblical Basis for Missions / God's Heart for the Nations*. <https://www.globalfrontiermissions.org/missions-101/biblical-basis-of-missions>, 2023.

humanity.¹⁶ Therefore, the biblical foundation for Christian missionary commitment is solid, rooted in the teachings of Jesus, the practices of the early church, Old Testament visions of integration between nations, and theological interpretations in the epistles. Together, these scriptures outline the divine imperative for Christians to engage in missions: to spread the gospel message and embody the teachings of Christ in diverse cultural contexts. Given these considerations, it is inevitable that engaging in missionary activities is both a biblical command and a central aspect of Christian practice rooted in authoritative scriptural sources.

Strategies for Sustainable Missions Engagement in the Community

Strategies for sustainable missions' engagement in the community involve long-term, impactful approaches that aim to address the needs of the community while ensuring the continued success and effectiveness of the missions. Exploring various approaches and principles can equip mission-minded individuals, churches, and missions' organizations with the tools to initiate and sustain meaningful engagement with these communities, which are often marked by distinct cultural, linguistic, and religious contexts that shape their worldviews and ways of life.¹⁷ Cultural and linguistic barriers compound the challenges of engaging with Unreached People Groups. These strategies involve a range of activities and initiatives that are designed to foster positive change, build relationships, and create lasting impact within the community. Sustainable missions' engagement requires careful planning, collaboration with community members, and a commitment to ongoing evaluation and adaptation. It involves a deep understanding of the community's needs, strengths, and challenges, as well as a willingness to work alongside community members to achieve shared goals.

Another strategy for sustainable missions' engagement in the community is to prioritize collaboration and partnership with local stakeholders. This involves actively seeking input from

¹⁶ Emma Wild-Wood and Peniel Rajkumar, eds. *Foundations for Mission*. (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, St. Philip and St James Church, Woodstock Road, webmaster, 2013, <https://missionexus.org/foundations-for-mission/> January 1, 2014.

¹⁷ Preaching.com Staff. *Strategies for Engaging with Unreached People Groups*. <https://www.preaching.com/articles/strategies-for-engaging-with-unreached-people-groups/>, 2023

community members, organizations, and leaders to ensure that the mission aligns with the real needs and priorities of the community. By engaging in meaningful dialogue and building strong partnerships, missions' organizations can develop more effective and sustainable solutions that have a greater chance of success. Rather than pursuing short-term fixes or one-off interventions, missions' organizations should strive to develop initiatives that have lasting impact. By openly communicating with stakeholders about goals, progress, challenges, and outcomes, they can build trust and reveal their commitment to making a positive difference in the community.

Also, understanding what Christian Missions is and learning the people's native language are other strategies. Understanding that the Christian mission seeks to engage with the whole person, where humans are seen as created as materials, social and spiritual beings and that all of these aspects are important to God and must be dealt with synthetically. Such an understanding of the Christian mission can be attributed to the frequent injunctions and teachings in the Bible to care for the poor, widows, orphans and strangers as part of the responsibility of those who seek to follow the Lord. This is also seen when Jesus becomes a model for believers through his practice and teaching according to his understanding of mission and his actions towards poor and marginalized people.¹⁸ These facilitate meaningful conversations and demonstrate a genuine desire to connect and learn from the people's culture. Language acts as a crucial bridge for effective communication and relationship-building.

In addition to that, religious and spiritual contexts play a significant role in missions' engagement with the community. Recognizing the peoples' religious context and developing strategies that address their spiritual needs with cultural sensitivity is essential in effectively engaging with these communities. Also, mobilizing the church in prayer is essential for effective missions' engagement and raising consciousness and fostering a culture of prayer within the local body; the entire church can actively participate in interceding for the community to be saved and come to the knowledge

¹⁸ Phoebe Yee and Ajit Hazra "Christian Mission and Development: Perspectives in Community Transformation from World Vision Sri Lanka and Thailand." *Organized by Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore The Mission Of Development: Religion And Techno-Politics In Asia* (3-4 DECEMBER 2015).

of God.¹⁹ Seeking God's direction and interceding for their spiritual and physical needs, removal of strongholds, the raising up of local leaders and cultural barriers to be bridged.

Furthermore, contextualization is also crucial for effective missions' engagement. Understanding this concept allows missionaries to present the gospel in a way that resonates with the local culture. By adapting the message, methods, and expressions of faith to their cultural context, missionaries ensure that the Good News is communicated effectively and meaningfully and that the gospel is presented in a way that is both culturally relevant and faithful to its message, fostering a profound and lasting impact on the community. Effective missions' engagement requires a deep cultural awareness and sensitivity commitment. Learning about local traditions and customs is essential for effective engagement.

Finally, language Acquisition and Translation are pivotal in effective missions' engagement within any community, especially in a cross-cultural setting. Learning the local language demonstrates respect, builds trust, and allows for more meaningful connections and conversations with the community. It enables missionaries and workers to communicate the message of the gospel directly, breaking down language barriers and fostering more profound understanding. Speaking the language of the people also opens doors for relationship-building and cultural exchange, ultimately leading to more effective ministry. Developing translated resources and materials is another crucial aspect of language engagement. By translating key Scriptures, discipleship materials, worship songs, and other resources, missionaries can ensure that the gospel is accessible and understandable to the local community. Understanding the nuances of language, non-verbal cues, and communication preferences allows missionaries to convey the gospel's message effectively.

Therefore, through these strategies, linguistic obstacles are removed, communication gaps are bridged, and local communities are empowered to encounter God's truth in their heart language, facilitating transformative encounters with the gospel.

¹⁹ Prayer as the Foundation by Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LOP) No. 42, (Pattaya, Thailand, 2004. chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpeglclefindmkaj/https://lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP42_IG13.pdf)

Integration of Transformational Leadership and Christian Mission

The integration of transformational leadership and Christian mission involves applying transformational leadership principles in the context of Christian ministry and evangelism. Transformational leadership aligns well with the values and principles of the Christian missions.²⁰ The emphasis on vision, inspiration, and empowerment in transformational leadership resonates with core tenets of Christianity, such as serving others, promoting justice, and fostering spiritual growth. When applied to Christian missions, transformational leadership can help leaders mobilize and empower individuals within faith communities to actively engage in missionary activities actively, promoting social justice and spreading the message of love and compassion.²¹ An essential aspect of integrating transformational leadership into the Christian mission is the emphasis on servant leadership. Servant leadership, a concept rooted in Christian teachings, emphasizes humility, empathy, and an emphasis on serving others. Transformational leaders integrate servant leadership principles into their approach, prioritizing the needs of their followers and finding ways to empower them to serve others effectively. This is consistent with the Christian mission's emphasis on selfless service and care for those in need.

Additionally, integrating transformational leadership into Christian missions includes cultivating a sense of purpose and commitment among individuals involved in missionary work. Transformational leaders inspire a shared vision that is consistent with the values and beliefs of the Christian community.²² By building a compelling vision for missionary activities that reflects Christian values, leaders can motivate individuals to actively participate in outreach efforts and contribute to achieving missionary goals. Furthermore, integrating transformational leadership

²⁰ Song X. Zhang "A Study of Followers under Transformational Leadership." *Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Management*, Walden University May 2016. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3493&context=dissertations>.

²¹ Gilbert, Jacobs. *Six ways to follow Jesus' example and become a transformational leader* OCF Communications <https://www.ocfusa.org/2016/03/six-ways-transformational-leader/> 2018.

²² Theresa, Ha Nguyen. *The Impacts of Transformational Leadership on A Religious Congregation of Women* A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master in the School of Communication at Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky, 2017.

with Christian missions emphasizes ethical behavior and moral integrity. Transformational leaders must model ethical behavior and maintain ethical principles while interacting with others. In the context of the Christian mission, this involves promoting ethical behavior based on Christian values such as honesty, compassion and respect for human dignity. Overall, integrating transformational leadership with the Christian mission provides a framework for individuals within the Christian community to actively engage in missionary activities while also maintaining ethical standards and promoting central Christian values.

Conclusion

Applying transformational leadership principles within the context of Christian missions sustains the church's engagement with the community and offers excellent potential to promote positive change in it. By applying visionary leadership rooted in biblical values and demonstrating genuine concern for individual well-being, Christian leaders can effectively mobilize followers to engage in comprehensive missionary efforts aimed at meeting the spiritual and practical needs of the people. Through their transformative influence, these leaders can contribute to sustainable community development that reflects God's redemptive purpose.

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Received on Feb 07, 2024

Accepted on March 11, 2024

Published on April 01, 2024

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