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Transformational Leadership and Fundraising Outcomes in Non-Denominational Mission Organizations: A Narrative Integrative Review

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Abstract: *This narrative integrative review examines the intersection of Transformational Leadership theory and fundraising outcomes in non-denominational mission organizations, with particular attention to the African context. Analysis of five thematic domains viz, biblical paradigms of fundraising; leadership theories and fundraising implications; the African mission funding crisis; traditional versus contemporary fundraising frameworks and the leadership-fundraising nexus; which reveals that while Transformational Leadership offers robust explanatory potential for fundraising effectiveness, empirical research connecting these constructs within mission contexts remains underdeveloped. The review identifies critical gaps in current scholarship and proposes a research agenda prioritizing instrument development, quantitative correlational studies, qualitative case studies, and cross-cultural comparative research. Practical implications for mission leaders include prioritizing leadership development as a strategic fundraising imperative and adopting portfolio approaches to fundraising methodology and frameworks.*

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, fundraising, mission organizations, non-denominational, Africa, nonprofit management*

I. INTRODUCTION

The global mission enterprise faces a persistent funding crisis that threatens its capacity to fulfill the Great Commission mandate as given by the Lord Jesus Christ in Mathew 28:19-20. According to data from the Traveling Team, while evangelical Christians earn approximately \$6.72 trillion annually, only 1.5% (\$896 billion) is directed to any Christian cause, and a mere 6% (\$52 billion) of that amount supports missions-related activities; only 1.7% (\$880 million) reaches Unreached People Groups (UPGs), that is the different population groupings most in need of gospel access (Clark, 2023). This funding crisis is particularly acute among non-denominational mission organizations in Africa, which operate without the institutional support structures available to denominational entities (Clark, 2023).

In addition, the leadership styles practiced by mission leaders may significantly influence fundraising outcomes. Transformational Leadership, as conceptualized by Burns (1978) and operationalized by Bass (1985), emphasizes inspiring followers to transcend self-interest for collective goals, raising both motivation and morality. This approach has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse organizational contexts (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2019), yet its specific application to mission fundraising remains insufficiently explored. This narrative integrative review addresses five critical questions: (1) What biblical paradigms inform fundraising practice in mission contexts? (2) How do various leadership theories relate to fundraising effectiveness? (3) What characterizes the African mission funding crisis? (4) What are the strengths and limitations of traditional versus contemporary fundraising frameworks? (5) What is the nature of the leadership-fundraising nexus in mission organizations?

A. Background and Rationale

Dr. Sas Conradie of the Global Generosity Network posits that the key missions giving models that exist within the African context are: mission awareness initiatives (Issachar Initiative, Missions Supporters League, Gospel Bankers), church denomination-based giving (Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Four Square Gospel Church), and pooled mission funds (MacLellan Foundation, Strategic Resources Group). However, no specific figures exist for African mission giving, and the perception is that African Christians give approximately 4% of their income to Christian causes, with only 3% of the 4% directed to missions. Missions giving therefore, is also often collective and asset-based, involving produce, livestock, and personal time (Conradie, 2014). These developments compound the challenge for non-denominational mission leadership, whose fundraising pool is already limited.

As a missionary who has served with Missions Supporters League (MSL) for over 25 years, the researcher has witnessed firsthand the challenges contemporary non-denominational mission leadership face with respect to funding. David Joannes (2023) observes that foreign and indigenous missionaries in the unreached world are not receiving proper funding. Andrew Abah, International Director of Grace Foundation Inland Mission (GFIM), also states that "doing mission work in this part of Africa is quite demanding now, as critical needs keep staring at us with very little coming in financially" (Abah, 2023). Bitrus Audu, Director of Christ Missionary Outreach Ministries (CMOM), agrees and reports that they sometimes operate under an inadequate financial base for years, with financial pressure for supporting missionaries and field projects being rather heavy. This has forced deliberate cutbacks in outreaches, engagement of additional workers, church planting, and community development projects (Audu, 2010). These documented accounts corroborate the statistical evidence of a systemic funding crisis.

The problem therefore, is that non-denominational mission organizations in Africa face a severe and persistent funding crisis, operating without the institutional support and structures available to denominational entities, while relying on limited, asset-based giving pools within a poorly documented philanthropic and Christian giving landscape (Clark, 2023; Conradie, 2014). This resource inadequacy has forced missionary attrition, operational cutbacks, and program failures in some instances, yet the specific mechanisms by which leadership influences fundraising outcomes in these contexts remain empirically unexplored. Although Transformational Leadership has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse organizational settings (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2019), no validated instruments exist for measuring its application in mission fundraising, that links leadership behaviors to donor engagement and fundraising remain theoretically underspecified, and the moderating effects of African cultural dynamics. This includes communal identity and oral communication traditions on leadership effectiveness that have not been examined. Furthermore, these organizations remain heavily dependent on traditional fundraising models while underutilizing contemporary digital and diversified frameworks, perpetuating a cycle of underfunding that threatens mission sustainability. Consequently, a critical evidence gap persists between the theoretical potential of Transformational Leadership to enhance fundraising outcomes and the practical guidance needed by African non-denominational mission leaders to mobilize resources effectively.

B. Research Objectives

Four objectives are derived from this problem statement, and they are: (1) to examine the biblical basis of fundraising by individuals; (2) to investigate the nexus between Transformational Leadership and fundraising outcomes of contemporary non-denominational mission leadership; (3) to examine current fundraising methods and their impact on fundraising outcomes; and (4) to explore the need for new and non-traditional fundraising methods and frameworks that will help fill the funding gap for non-denominational missions leaders.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This review is grounded in two primary frameworks. First, Transformational Leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) and it provides the central analytical lens. Burns (1978) originally distinguished Transformational from Transactional Leadership, defining the former as occurring "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Bass (1985) subsequently operationalized this concept through four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, developing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) for empirical measurement. Second, Spiritual Leadership theory (Fry, 2003) offers a complementary framework particularly relevant to faith-based contexts. Fry proposed a causal theory incorporating vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love as core components, arguing that spiritual leadership creates intrinsic motivation through calling and membership. This theory has been validated across over 100 organizations (Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry et al., 2005) and provides a bridge between secular leadership constructs and mission-specific contexts.

A. Method

This narrative integrative review employed a systematic approach to literature synthesis following Whitemore and Knafl (2005). The search strategy encompassed academic databases (JSTOR, Google Scholar, ATLA Religion Database), organizational reports, and grey literature. Search terms included combinations of "Transformational Leadership," "fundraising," "mission organizations," "non-denominational," "Africa," and "nonprofit management." Inclusion criteria required sources to address either leadership theory in organizational contexts or fundraising in mission/nonprofit settings. The review prioritized peer-reviewed sources while incorporating relevant practitioner literature. Each thematic domain was evaluated for conceptual clarity, empirical support, and practical applicability.

III. BIBLICAL PARADIGMS OF FUNDRAISING

The biblical record provides foundational paradigms that continue to inform contemporary mission practice. The Mosaic tabernacle campaign (Exodus 25-36) represents a comprehensive model, in this case Moses painted a clear vision, specified needed resources, empowered skilled workers, and created conditions for voluntary, generous giving. The campaign's success was remarkable with contributions exceeded requirements, necessitating Moses to restrain further donations (Exodus 36:5-7), demonstrating the power of vision-casting and specificity (Pitman, 2013; Rodgers, 2018). King David's temple fundraising (1 Chronicles 29) illustrates leadership by example; his substantial personal contribution preceded his appeal, establishing credibility and inspiring followership (Clark, 2015; Pitman, 2013). Furthermore, Nehemiah's wall reconstruction (Nehemiah 2-4) demonstrates resource mobilization from diverse sources, including pagan governmental support, through integration of prayer, personal assessment, and clear need articulation (Pitman, 2013). To further highlight the Biblical paradigm of fundraising, Paul's collection for Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9) institutionalizes systematic, regular giving, with emphasis on cheerful, voluntary giving rather than compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7), establishing enduring ethical parameters (Shadrach, 2013).

Despite their strengths, biblical paradigms present limitations when applied uncritically. These narratives describe divinely-initiated campaigns with supernatural confirmations alongside conditions that may not be replicable in modern fundraising and would be dependent on several factors. The assumption that God-directed appeals without clear goals and plans, will automatically succeed may lead to neglect of strategic planning. Furthermore, biblical fundraising occurred within covenant communities with strong collective identity; contemporary donors operate in pluralistic environments with competing philanthropic and fundraising demands. Biblical narratives are sometimes context relevant for interpretation, and may not address financial reporting, or organizational governance issues central to contemporary donor expectations and which contemporary mission leaders overlook. Mission leaders should extract principles (vision clarity, leadership example, specificity of need, voluntary generosity) rather than replicate practices, adapting application to contemporary donor expectations and communication technologies.

IV. LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND FUNDRAISING IMPLICATIONS

Leadership theory offers diverse frameworks for understanding how leaders influence organizational outcomes including fundraising effectiveness. Trait theory suggests that innate characteristics differentiate leaders from non-leaders (Northouse, 2019), but has limited practical utility for fundraising development; if effectiveness depends primarily on innate traits, training becomes largely irrelevant. Meta-analyses demonstrate that trait-based predictions of leadership effectiveness are modest at best (Judge et al., 2002). On the other hand, Fiedler's (1967) contingency model proposes that effectiveness depends on the match between leader style and situational favorableness, offering insights for different organizational contexts, but its static assumption that leadership style is fixed has been criticized (Adero & Odiyo, 2020). Existing literature by Greenleaf (1970), suggests that Servant Leadership emphasizes prioritizing follower needs and has gained traction in Christian contexts (Burkus, 2010), but may create tension with fundraising assertiveness; the emphasis on serving rather than asking may lead to under-investment in resource development (van Dierendonck, 2011).-Check validity of the quotes

According to Fry (2003), Spiritual Leadership theory offers particular relevance for mission contexts. By integrating vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, the theory captures dimensions of motivation particularly relevant to religiously-motivated giving. Studies across diverse organizational types have demonstrated positive relationships between spiritual leadership and organizational outcomes including productivity and commitment (Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry et al., 2005). However, the theory's measurement instruments require further validation in mission-specific contexts, and causal mechanisms linking spiritual leadership to fundraising outcomes remain underexplored.

Transformational Leadership therefore, emerges as the most promising framework for understanding fundraising effectiveness. Bass's (1985) operationalization through four components provides both conceptual clarity and empirical measurability. Idealized influence builds trust and credibility essential for donor confidence and sustained partnership. Inspirational motivation articulates compelling vision, connecting donors to transcendent purpose, particularly important for mission giving where donors seek impact beyond immediate returns. Intellectual stimulation encourages innovation in fundraising approaches, enabling adaptation to changing donor demographics and communication technologies. Individualized consideration recognizes donors as individuals with unique motivations and capacities, enabling personalized engagement strategies. Meta-analytic evidence confirms Transformational Leadership's positive effects on follower satisfaction, effort, and performance across organizational types (Lowe et al., 1996), and the theory's emphasis on intrinsic motivation aligns with research on religious giving motivations that often transcend transactional exchange (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011).

Still, several limitations require acknowledgment. Conceptual clarity concerns persist as the theory encompasses vision, charisma, motivation, trust-building, and change agency elements that may be conceptually distinct rather than unified. Factor analyses of the MLQ have shown high intercorrelations among components, raising questions about discriminant validity (Northouse, 2019). The theory's treatment of leadership as personality trait rather than learnable behavior has been challenged, and its elitist implications that emphasizes exceptional leader influence may conflict with mission contexts emphasizing team-based ministry. In addition, questions about cross-cultural applicability are also there; while Bass (1997) demonstrated cross-cultural validity in various national contexts, the specific dynamics of African mission contexts with oral communication traditions, communal decision-making, and patron-client relationships may require theoretical adaptation.

V. THE AFRICAN MISSION FUNDING TRANSITION

For some time now there has been increasing calls by several practicing missionaries for the African missions landscape to transition from western donor financing dependency to more resilient locally-driven funding models. Events such as the COVID-19, and ongoing economic instability, including issues like donor fatigue at different levels are accelerating this necessary shift. This is causing missions practitioners and support networks in African to rethink how resources are mobilized and sustained. This transition presents both an opportunity and challenge for missions leaders to adapt without compromising missional identity. As observed earlier, Conradie (2014) stated that no specific figures exist for African mission giving, but perception suggests African Christians give approximately 4% of income to Christian causes, with only 3% directed to missions. This contrasts with the broader statistic that only 6% of global Christian giving reaches missions-related activities (Clark, 2023). The limited pool creates intense competition among organizations, with non-denominational entities particularly disadvantaged. Tukura (2021) documented that missions attrition and inability to execute programs can be traced largely to resource inadequacy. The challenge is not merely insufficient funds but misallocation as money flows to other church denomination determined priorities other than missions, suggesting that mission leaders must compete for attention within donor portfolios rather than assuming automatic support.

Several structural factors exacerbate the crisis. First, African mission organizations often lack administrative infrastructure for professional fundraising; unlike Western counterparts with dedicated resource development departments, African organizations frequently rely on leaders to personally manage fundraising alongside operational responsibilities. Second, the predominance of traditional fundraising models like individual donor solicitation, church appeals, and faith-based dependence limits access to diversified funding streams. Abah (2012) identified models including the George Muller approach (prayer-only), Hudson Taylor model (prayer and sharing without asking), D.L. Moody approach (direct asking), and Bill Bright model (systematic support team development). These models, while historically significant, may be insufficient for contemporary challenges. Third, limited statistical data on African mission giving hampers evidence-based advocacy; without robust data demonstrating giving patterns and gaps, organizations struggle to make compelling cases for investment (Conradie, 2014).

Despite limitations, current approaches demonstrate resilience. Faith-based dependence models have sustained organizations through extended resource scarcity; personal relationship networks provide stable, even though limited support bases; church-based giving still represents substantial absolute funding. However, weaknesses are increasingly apparent and these include donor fatigue that diminishes response rates; over-reliance on individual donors creates vulnerability; limited diversification increases organizational risk; younger donors increasingly prefer digital engagement, impact transparency, and project-specific giving preferences poorly served by traditional approaches. Addressing the crisis requires both strategic and structural interventions in the form of diversifying funding portfolios, investing in fundraising infrastructure, and developing collaborative approaches such as pooled funding mechanisms and inter-organizational partnerships.

VI. TRADITIONAL VERSUS CONTEMPORARY FUNDRAISING FRAMEWORKS

The evolution of fundraising methodologies presents both opportunities and challenges for mission organizations as stated earlier on. Traditional fundraising encompasses face-to-face solicitation, direct mail, church appeals, and special events. These methods have sustained organizations for decades and retain advantages such as personal solicitation enables deep relationship building and high-context communication valued in African cultures; church appeals access established communities with shared values; special events create communal experiences reinforcing organizational identity. However, traditional frameworks face significant limitations. For example, face-to-face solicitation is geographically constrained and labor-intensive; direct mail suffers from declining response rates; church appeals increasingly compete with local ministry priorities; special events require substantial upfront investment with uncertain returns. Most critically, traditional methods poorly serve younger, digitally-native donor demographics.

Conversely, emerging frameworks leverage digital technologies and innovative financing mechanisms. Online fundraising platforms enable global reach with minimal infrastructure; crowdfunding models democratize giving and create viral engagement potential; e-commerce and social enterprise approaches generate earned revenue alongside donated income. Digital fundraising has demonstrated substantial growth, for example e-commerce expanded from \$1.4 trillion (2014) to an estimated \$6.8 trillion (2023), a 385% increase (DeMatas, 2022). Nonprofit digital fundraising has similarly accelerated, with organizations diversifying into Short Message Service (SMS), social media, and personalized digital campaigns achieving significant returns (MissionWired, 2024). Contemporary frameworks offer scalability, data analytics for precision targeting, transparency mechanisms including real-time project tracking, and diversification across digital channels reducing dependence on single funding sources.

Despite advantages, contemporary frameworks have their challenges too. Digital literacy requirements may exclude some leaders and donors, particularly in contexts with limited technology access and the ones in the older age-bracket. The rapid pace of technological change demands continuous learning and adaptation. Digital relationships may lack the depth and trust of personal connections, potentially affecting donor retention. Platform fees and transaction costs reduce net revenue, and digital security concerns require ongoing investment. The integration of traditional and contemporary approaches creating hybrid models may offer optimal solutions; personal relationships remain foundational while digital tools extend reach and efficiency. However, such integration requires leadership capable of navigating both domains, suggesting the importance of Transformational Leadership's intellectual stimulation component in fostering adaptive capacity.

VII. THE LEADERSHIP-FUNDRAISING NEXUS

The central question underlying this review concerns how leadership style specifically influences fundraising outcomes. Transformational Leadership offers compelling theoretical mechanisms namely, idealized influence builds trust essential for major gift solicitation; inspirational motivation connects donors to transcendent purpose; intellectual stimulation encourages innovative approaches responsive to changing environments; individualized consideration enables personalized donor engagement that increases retention and lifetime value. These mechanisms align with established fundraising principles; research on donor motivation emphasizes the importance of trust, impact perception, and personal connection (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). Furthermore, Transformational Leadership's emphasis on organizational culture change may create sustainable fundraising advantages that persist beyond individual leader tenure.

Despite theoretical plausibility, direct empirical evidence linking Transformational Leadership to fundraising outcomes in mission contexts remains limited. The broader nonprofit literature demonstrates leadership effects on organizational performance (Waters, 2020); but fundraising-specific studies are almost non-existent especially for non-denominational mission organizations. One recent study found that nonprofits led by transformational leaders experienced increased fundraising success, but this research focused on Western organizations and did not isolate mission-specific dynamics (Waters, 2020). Original empirical work (Sanda, 2024) found that 90% of surveyed mission leaders recognized leadership style's influence on fundraising, and 90% expressed openness to new frameworks; however, methodological limitations including small sample size ($n = 10$) and absence of validated instruments preclude definitive conclusions.

Several critical gaps emerge from this review. First, no validated instrument exists for measuring leadership behaviors specifically in mission fundraising contexts; adaptation of the MLQ or development of mission-specific measures is needed. Second, the specific pathways through which Transformational Leadership influences fundraising outcomes remain underspecified; mediating variables organizational culture, donor trust, volunteer engagement require identification and measurement. Third, African cultural contexts, with emphasis on communal identity, respect for authority, and oral communication, may moderate leadership effectiveness in ways not captured by Western-developed theories. Fourth, fundraising outcomes have been inadequately operationalized, revenue alone is insufficient, and donor retention, relationship quality, and missional impact should be incorporated. Finally, cross-sectional studies dominate; longitudinal research is needed to establish causality and capture developmental trajectories.

VIII. RESEARCH AGENDA AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A comprehensive research agenda should prioritize seven directions. First, instrument development and validation which should include creating and validating measures of leadership behaviors and fundraising outcomes specific to mission contexts. Second, quantitative correlational studies embarked on and employ validated instruments with adequate sample sizes ($n \geq 100$) to establish relationships between Transformational Leadership behaviors and fundraising outcomes across diverse mission organizations. Third, qualitative case studies are recommended via the conduct in-depth investigations of high-performing mission leaders to identify specific practices and contextual factors.

Fourth, mixed-methods explanatory designs that combine quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to explain statistical relationships and identify mediating mechanisms. Fifth, intervention studies that evaluate leadership development programs' effects on fundraising outcomes through pre-test and post-test designs with control groups. Sixth, cross-cultural comparative research to compare leadership-fundraising dynamics across African, Asian, and Western contexts to identify universal principles and cultural specificities. Seventh, longitudinal panel studies aimed at tracking organizations over 3-5 years to establish causal directions and capture developmental trajectories.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

For mission practitioners, this review underscores that leadership development is not merely an organizational management concern but a strategic fundraising imperative. Mission leaders should prioritize leadership development as a fundraising strategy, cultivating specific competencies including vision communication, relationship building, adaptive capacity, and donor-centered thinking through structured training and mentoring. Organizational boards should evaluate fundraising leadership as a core competency in leader selection and development. Mission leaders should adopt strategic portfolio approaches, balancing traditional and contemporary methods according to organizational capacity, donor demographics, and contextual factors. Investment in digital infrastructure and skills development is essential, with experimentation encouraged and careful evaluation of return on investment. Collaborative learning across organizations can accelerate capability development while reducing individual organizational risk.

X. CONCLUSION

This narrative integrative review has critically examined five thematic domains central to understanding the leadership-fundraising nexus in non-denominational mission organizations. These are that, biblical paradigms provide enduring principles requiring contextual adaptation; leadership theories offer diverse explanatory frameworks, with Transformational Leadership emerging as most promising; the African mission funding crisis demands urgent attention and multifaceted responses; traditional and contemporary fundraising frameworks each present distinctive strengths and limitations, and that the leadership-fundraising nexus, while theoretically compelling, remains empirically underdeveloped.

The review's central contribution lies in synthesizing diverse literatures into a coherent framework while identifying specific gaps requiring research attention. For mission practitioners, the review underscores that leadership development is a strategic fundraising imperative. For researchers, the review provides a roadmap for empirical investigation that can advance both theory and practice. The funding crisis facing African mission organizations is not merely a financial challenge but a leadership challenge. As this review has demonstrated, the capacity to inspire, innovate, and individualize the core of Transformational Leadership may be precisely what is needed to mobilize the resources necessary for mission fulfillment. Whether this theoretical promise translates into empirical reality awaits the potential research endeavours this review has advocated for in the paper.

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