

**Understanding Leadership Principles and Team Dynamics in Nonprofit Settings:  
A Study of Short and Long-Term Missionary Teams**

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## **Introduction**

Have you ever pondered how to form the most effective leadership team for missionary work? Missionary work is extremely important to the Christian Church and building leaders within the church community. Without them, others wouldn't get to hear the gospel. This research could benefit someone who wants to pursue a career in ministry. One field of ministry and possible career choice someone could pursue is to become a missionary. Performing this research means learning more about how to be effective in a career choice such as a missionary. In addition to that, it could benefit someone who is a business major. In this major a person learns a lot about teamwork and leadership and is exposed to working in some highly effective teams, and also some that are not so effective. This research will discover how missionary teams (both short and long-term) can be most effective in accomplishing the task at hand. It will also show what leadership looks like on a mission field and how to bring that leadership, along with a short-term team, to be most helpful to the missionaries already on the field. The findings from this research will help those in the field of ministry to become the best missionary they can be, whether they become a long-term missionary on the field, or occasionally go to help on short-term trips.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine short-term and long-term missionary teams in order to identify specific qualities for effective team formation and leadership styles. Often limited training and development is offered for short-term missionary teams, and more professional long-term teams lack appropriate training around team development and leadership styles. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with both those who are currently on the mission field and those who have previously been involved in missions work.

## **Significance**

The findings from this study can be used to determine how to best assemble impactful missionary teams capable of achieving short or long-term objectives. Missionaries have unique objectives in doing good work and sharing the gospel in diverse locations around the world. Research has shown that missionaries often cannot accomplish this large task without a supportive team. They also need a leadership style that allows them to work collaboratively as a team and find ways to connect with their targeted audience. Proper training and development can be important factors in determining the overall success of these missionaries and their partner organizations.

This study can guide the development of short-term mission teams, so they are able to achieve their own objectives, while also helping long-term mission teams complete their more comprehensive mission. In doing so more people will receive help and hear the gospel and less time will be spent dealing with organizational issues.

Through this research missionaries will have more insight about team dynamics and creating the most effective teams. They will also have more information on how to be a more effective and helpful leader. This research will be a helpful source for missionaries everywhere who are looking to improve their own leadership, as well as team dynamics.

## **Literature Review**

### **Non-profit, missionary focused, religious organizations**

Missionary teams are a key source in spreading the gospel to those who have never heard it before. There are many different organizations that use these missionaries and missionary teams to accomplish their own mission to reach the world with the gospel. Some of these are

organizations like Christian Missionary Fellowship International, which is one big missionary team serving in 26 countries. Their mission is to create Christ-centered communities that transform the world, which they do by planting churches, serving the poor, developing communities, and developing the marketplace (Christian Missionary Fellowship International, 2020). An organization called Youth With A Mission is reaching out to 180 countries through evangelism, training, and mercy ministry. Their mission is to know God and to make Him known (Youth With A Mission, 2020). Other organizations like World Vision International and Samaritan's Purse have a mission to help those in poverty. They go where no most will not, taking into account where help is most needed.

Many people and other organizations question the motives of these non-profits and whether they are truly doing what they say. Pamela Yuen researches the criticisms of World Vision International and explains what the heart of this organization truly is in her article, "'Things that Break the Heart of God': Child Sponsorship Programs and World Vision International (Yuen, 2008)." She points out that World Vision International has a motivation to Spread the Word of God and are using their sense of duty to care for those in need to accomplish this. World Vision International uses child sponsorship to help children in developing countries, and in doing this are also helping the community around these children. Not only that, but they are bringing awareness to the need in these communities, by educating people in developed countries so that more children can become sponsored. The money doesn't go to the children directly, but it supplies the need in the child's community because they believe that "When children are fed, sheltered, schooled, protected, valued and loved a community thrives," (Yuen, 2008). It's all about helping people and helping their communities by showing them love.

Some of these non-profits choose to spread the gospel, while rarely ever addressing salvation. Paivi Hasu describes this as a sort of holistic approach in his article “Faith-based development of World Vision Tanzania” (Hasu, 2018). People come to know the word when others meet them where they’re at and help them from there. The World Vision approach to missions is to empower others with a faith-based approach. They believe that a person must have faith that they will get to wherever they want to be and have a plan to get there; this will drive their success. A person must have faith that he can change and break away from past circumstances despite how his ancestors were. World Visions empowers others by showing and teaching them where they can be and then helping them get there.

### **Non-profit organization leadership styles**

All organizations have leaders and need strong leaders to succeed. There are different types of leaders and leadership styles that individuals can have. There are three main leadership styles within organizations, and they are transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leaders are seeking to transform both the individuals and the organization as they move forward. These leaders seek change and strive to better the organization. Transactional leaders work within what already exists. They don’t try to change the system that is already there. They offer rewards if their expectations are met. A person whose leadership style is laissez faire makes little effort to help others grow and avoids their responsibility as a leader (Lutz, et al., 2013). Aside from the three main leadership styles, there is another type of leader which is called the servant leader. This is someone who leads by serving others. They are going to grow the organization by helping others in need. A servant leader recognizes others’ need to be served and therefore desires to serve them (McClellan, 2012). In his research, Gardner found that servant leadership can be a learned trait (McClellan, 2012). This

is fortunate because servant-leaders can be very beneficial to an organization. The type of leadership style that is present in an organization can positively or negatively affect the organization as a whole. Ultimately every organization is striving to have a leader who is going to grow the company to become better, not worse. It can be hard to find someone like this in any organization, but it is found to be even more of a challenge in a faith-based organization.

There are many challenges finding the right leaders for non-profit faith-based organizations. One of those challenges is finding a quality candidate who also has the Christian principles that your organization is striving for. Faith Community Services' board chair, Brandon Leung, found this to be true when he stated "We are first and foremost a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to serve the community, regardless of faith or background. Yet, to advance this mission, the management of this organization must be guided by Christian principles and values," (Yip, et al., 2010). This is a challenge in talent management. Organizations must choose a talented candidate but all while keeping the organization's objectives in mind. Another challenge that Faith Community Services found in faith-based organizational leadership was that it is hard to create a shared sense of identity. It seemed that in this organization, "under the former chief executive the staff suffered from a low sense of morale, unclear direction, and diminished sense of purpose," (Yip, et al., 2010). Leung tried to fix this through weekly meetings, development of cultural values, and Christian symbols placed throughout the office but still the group was split 50/50. Brandon Leung also found issues regarding the board for a non-profit faith-based organization. There was another situation in which a few board members felt one way and others felt another way regarding the organization's identity. They questioned whether or not they should be sharing their Christian principles within the employees of the organization when they have secular motivations for the work they are doing. Leung found that

there should be a governance and intervention of the board so that these issues do not come up so often (Yip, et al., 2010). There are many challenges facing an organization such as Faith Community Services, but these challenges show the importance of a strong leader like Brandon Leung who is willing to address difficult topics and better the organization.

Organizations like Faith Community Services and World Vision mentioned earlier are non-profit organizations and their motives are missional focused. Because these organizations are missional focused, it's important to look at what missionary leadership looks like. Missionary leadership isn't much different than what any other leadership should look like but David R. Dunaetz found a few key concepts that missionaries should keep in mind. He found that missionary leaders do not only need to focus on the task at hand but also on developing relationships with those they come into contact with (Dunaetz, 2019). It's important that they are spreading the gospel with others but also that they are continuing to build these people up and getting to know them personally. Another important concept is that missionary leaders pay attention to their own decision-making process. They find whether it's best to make the decision without the help of any other leaders or whether it will be best to ask the opinions of other leaders and involve them in the process. Dunaetz found that, like any other successful leader, it is important for a missionary leader to set goals and then monitor successes. This will help the ones they are leading to become more productive because they will know what they're striving for. Knowing the goal you are trying to accomplish gives more motivation for working towards it. Delegation is another important fundamental for missionary leaders. This is one area that is very difficult for most leaders but also so important to practice. Delegation gives the opportunity to train and equip those you are leading to one day take on your role. Without delegating tasks and responsibilities to the people being led, no one will know how to do it when the leader is gone.

An important note that Dunaetz points out is that a missionary leader should also know when to delegate and when not to delegate. Lastly, they should be flexible and willing to change.

Successful leaders pay attention to the things that need to be changed and they make those changes. They have an open-mind and are willing to be flexible with those who ask or have a problem. A good missionary leader will also ask questions to those higher than he/she about the organization and the ministry. They will seek advice for changes to better their ministry and develop it further. Missionary leadership isn't much different than any other leadership in that it is about those being led more than the one who is leading. It is about relationships and equipping those being led to one day be the leader.

### **Non-profit Organization Team Development**

Team development can be defined as enhancing effectiveness of teams by encouraging teamwork and interdependence and building trust among team members (Juneja, 2020). This is a process that is well-known in the business world but is important and should be used more often in other aspects of life. Team development is important in non-profit and missionary based organizations because these organizations use teams to accomplish their tasks at hand. There are 4 different stages in the team development process; they are forming, storming, norming, and performing. Forming is when the team is first getting to know each other and establishing boundaries and expectations. During the storming stage, the members begin to really get to work. In this stage the members must communicate to try to avoid conflicts that may arise. Third is the norming stage in which the team members start to notice each other's similarities and be more comfortable with each other. Members typically know each other better and there is a larger involvement within the team. The last stage is the performing stage in which the team has matured. This is where teams become most practical and self-controlled. Members of teams in



the performing stage understand their responsibilities and are self-motivated. It is important that any team understands these concepts and especially those in missionary work so that their work may be done in the most efficient manner.

It's important that teams develop throughout their time as a team to become a high-performing team so that they can quickly and efficiently get the job done. A strong team is cohesive, meaning their mission is to work together to achieve a common goal. Bob Nelson found there to be seven different characteristics of a high-performing team. These characteristics include purpose, empowerment, relationships and communication, flexibility, optimal productivity, recognition and appreciation, and morale (Nelson, 2010). To explain this further means members share a sense of common purpose, are confident in their ability to overcome obstacles, communicate openly and give constructive feedback, are flexible as needed, recognize individual and team accomplishments, and are enthusiastic about being a part of the team (Nelson, 2010). These characteristics show what a high-performing team will look like. It may take some time for teams to reach this point but if they are working together and working past issues, they will reach this point in becoming an effective team.

Many organizations already are effectively using teams to build and develop their organizations. One organization specifically is Christian Missionary Fellowship International. Their mission statement is that they are "a global mission team at work in 26 countries creating dynamic Christ-centered communities" (Christian Missionary Fellowship International). How do they do this? Well, they have multiple different ministries within their organization such as evangelism and discipleship, education and youth, global campus ministry, and more. Within each of these ministries they have people serving in multiple countries and multiple people in these countries. To be an effective team, the people who are all in the same country must

communicate to accomplish the tasks and goals for that specific area. Another way that they would use these teams is by asking for guidance from those in the same area of ministry but in a different country. It is always best to get another perspective and outlook to notice how someone else may see something differently. All organizations and missionaries can use this approach to teams in order to be successful. It only takes communication and cooperation to develop an effective and successful team.

### **Short vs. long-term success in nonprofit missionary-focused organizations**

Measuring effectiveness of a particular organization can be a complicated task. There are many different criteria that can be used as well as many different ways to measure. One research article found it was not possible to come up with a generalization for measuring effectiveness of non-profit faith-based organizations because of the diverse criteria that the organizations use (Jacobs & Polito, 2012). Different organizations have used different units of analysis for measuring effectiveness including individuals, teams, the business unit, and the corporation. Jacobs and Polito found that “Nonprofit effectiveness measurement is challenged by performance ambiguity related to the complexity of assessing abstract missions and accommodating the measurement interest of various stakeholders,” (Jacobs & Polito, 2012). The difficulty is found in the complexity of assessing these diverse concepts like measuring whether the organization is helping the homeless feel comforted and find hope. Jacobs and Polito found that faith-based non-profits defined and measured organizational effectiveness based on the outcomes their organizations achieved for the people they served (Jacobs & Polito, 2012). These organizations had goals to not only help individuals’ immediate needs but to also empower them to be more self-reliant. It's important that organizations are measuring their own effectiveness so

that they will continue to grow and build on the success of the organization in order to help and reach more individuals.

It is also important to measure the success and effectiveness of mission trips, including short and long-term trips. Short-term mission trips are oftentimes a lot about spiritual growth within the individual who is going on the trip. While it is important, they are accomplishing the task at hand to help others in need, the effectiveness is measured by personal spiritual development. Dayton Williams studied this personal spiritual growth in his research and provided real-life examples of individuals who found spiritual growth in their short-term mission trips. One individual in his research stated, “It was like God turned on a light in my life,” regarding a short-term medical mission trip in Guatemala (Williams, 2009; 2010). Another individual stated he does this work “because God planted in my heart a desire to see people liberated from the demonic influences of this world, like witchcraft and animistic influences. What a joy to see people rid of unnecessary fears and anxieties and learn to trust in the one true God,” (Williams, 2009;201). He knows that in this he is fulfilling what God has placed on his heart and in turn growing spiritually deeper in him. Remembering that “missional endeavors must be conducted with integrity and openness to God's Spirit,” is important in short-term missions to be sure that the work is being led by God and not solely by the individuals (Williams, 2009;201).

In long-term mission trips it can be much harder to pinpoint what success looks like. There hasn't been much research on the topic for this reason alone, but we can take a look at these long-term missional-focused organizations who are having to measure success in order to continue operating. Success can be measured by finances, community impact, and empowerment of those being helped. Long-term success is more about accomplishing the tasks at hand and

helping the individuals in need, rather than measuring the personal growth of the ones helping. Samaritan's purse focuses on disaster relief projects, hurricane recovery, and finding homes for children among other things (Samaritan's Purse International, 2020). Therefore, their long-term success is measuring whether they accomplished tasks and helped individuals or whether they didn't. World Vision is dedicated to "helping children, families, and their communities overcome poverty and injustice," (World Vision International, 2019). Their success is measured by empowering communities, demonstrating God's unconditional love, and using finances to benefit children and families in need (World Vision International, 2019). Youth With A Mission focuses on serving individuals in other countries through evangelism, training and mercy (Youth With A Mission, 2020). Through this, their success is determined by assessing the training of individuals and whether or not YWAM evangelized and showed mercy like they were there to do. Measuring success is a diverse concept and maybe isn't generally research because it's so complicated and complex but success is important in knowing whether the program being used is effective.

### **Method**

To conduct this research, a total of six people were interviewed using a standardized, open-ended interview method. The respondents ranged from ages 22 to 53. There were two men and four women who were interviewed. Five out of six participants were out of the state of North Carolina. All except one participant was interviewed over video-conferencing software allowing the interviewer to pick up on non-verbal cues related to the interview questions. The one participant was not interviewed using video conferencing software due to the proximity of the interviewee and ability to conduct an in-person interview. Three of the respondents were from faith-based non-profit organizations. These organizations included Building Hope, Heart for

ENC, and The Awakening. Building Hope is a youth and family development organization. Heart for ENC is an organization that equips and empowers nonprofit ministries. The awakening is an organization who is focused on equipping, resourcing, and mobilizing emerging leaders around the world. There were two people who have been on three to five short term mission trips. One person works as a global outreach partner for her church; in this position, she connects with missionaries across the globe and plans and coordinates short-term trips within the local church. The instrument used to collect this data was a survey of eight questions:

1. How do you define missionary work? In what ways have you seen missionary work transform the world?
2. What are some of the challenges you've faced in finding the right leaders for missionary work?
3. What would you say is the most beneficial leadership style in mission work? Does the style change based on whether it's a short or long-term mission?
4. Can you provide examples of effective missionary leaders?
5. How have you or your organization effectively used teams in missionary work?
6. What are some of the most important elements of an effective missionary team?
7. Can you give an example of a time that you experienced strong team development and/or weak team development?
8. How does your organization or the organization you work with measure success for their missions?

### **Analysis**

To collect this data from each individual a one-on-one interview was conducted, in which these questions were asked, and answers were provided by the individuals. After the interviews

were conducted, the data was compiled to identify any themes or trends within the responses. The themes cover those regarding leadership principles, team dynamics, short term missions, and long-term missions.

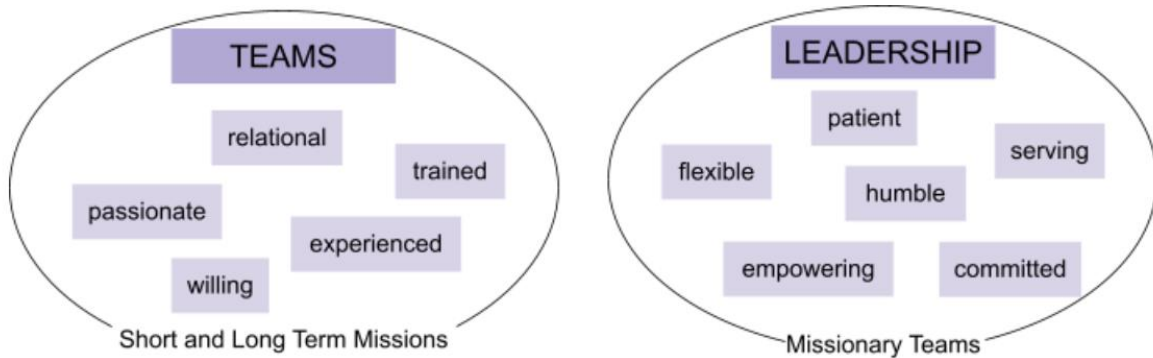
All notes taken from the interviews were then analyzed and key words were identified. This was possible by typing all interview responses and highlighting common words and phrases. As these words were identified they were then organized around central themes. These themes included the importance of servant leadership and flexibility among mission leaders. Many responses included highlighting the importance of being able to build relationships. These themes and key words identified the factors needed for an effective mission team.

## **Results**

The respondents included four women and two men ranging from ages 22 to 54. This could possibly sway or bias the results because most participants are from the same geographical area. However, several trends and themes were highlighted by the respondents. Five out of six participants mentioned servant leadership being an important quality or trait in a missionary leader. This was consistent for short and long-term missionary leadership. This was a common theme among participants. Another theme was that flexibility is important in missionary leadership. Three participants mentioned flexibility and adaptability being of high importance. When asked about strong leadership for a missionary team, common words and phrases that were mentioned by participants include patient, flexible, humble, serving, committed to the task, and empowering to those under their leadership, see Figure 1. The ability to build relationships was a common theme when asked about finding the right members for a team. In addition to that, the respondents mentioned looking for people who are passionate, willing, experienced, and

trained on what to do, also found in Figure 1. These are the results found based on the collection of data and answers received among interviews.

Figure 1. Qualities found in strong short and long-term mission teams



### Discussion

This research has shown that when looking for strong leadership among missionary teams it is important to find those who are flexible and willing to serve. Five out of six participants mentioned this, meaning that this type of leadership is most appreciated by those involved in missionary work. A lot of times, these teams are going to places where the work is going to be hard and is always changing. The leader must be flexible because roadblocks will come up and plans will have to change. If the leader is willing to serve, then he/she will be able to lead the team to accomplish the mission at hand. A servant leader recognizes others' need to be served and therefore desires to serve them (McClellan, 2012). It was previously found that servant leadership can be a learned trait. If it is a learned trait, then it will be possible to teach future leaders of missionary teams before letting them lead. It was also previously found that flexibility is an important quality among missionary leaders. Nelson actually found that flexibility is not only important among leaders, but in the entire team as well (Nelson, 2010). This research has

not shown that flexibility in teams is necessary, but it may be important to consider for future research.

It was found that these themes were consistent among short and long-term mission trips. What is needed for short-term is also important for long-term. The respondents mentioned that whether the team is working together for a short or a long amount of time, these specific skills are needed among leaders no matter what the time frame looks like. It was mentioned that strong leadership skills in team leaders are necessary for any team so that team members will be informed and knowledgeable about whatever is going on. A short-term team looks different in the aspect of not being able to work together and develop for as long, but both short-and long-term teams are looking for the same skills in a leader.

When gathering a team for any type of missionary work, developing team dynamics should be a priority. Teams are used because not everyone has the same talents and skills. However, when everyone comes together it creates one well-working team. Christian Missionary Fellowship International has previous knowledge on this because without the use of teams, they wouldn't be able to reach out to all 26 countries that they are present in (Christian Missionary Fellowship International, 2010). When conducting interviews, a common answer for what makes a strong team is for the team to meet a few times before they go on mission and have training to explain everything that will/could happen on the trip and to equip them with team expectations. This is so that the team can get to know each other and go through the first few stages of team development known as forming, storming, and norming. This allows the members to get out all of the issues and have the ability to work well together on the mission field. In this research, it was found that key traits to have in teams are someone who is relational, passionate, willing, experienced, and trained. Bob Nelson previously found that characteristics of a high performing



team include purpose, empowerment, relationships and communication, flexibility, optimal productivity, recognition and appreciation, and morale (Nelson, 2010). This aligns with what was found in this study as well. Many respondents mentioned relationships as a top answer for team development. In order for a short-term team to be effective there must be some relationship building among its members before beginning the mission. Aside from that, relationships must also be built with those being reached. This is consistent with other research that shows people come to know the word when others meet them where they're at. (Hasu, 2018). This is what building relationships is all about.

There must be some way to measure whether the mission was accomplished or if it failed. This research has shown that different organizations are all going to measure success in a different way. Whether it is a whole organizational approach or an individual approach, it is not going to be just like any other team. This is because different organizations and individuals have their own different tasks. Some goals are short-term, and some are long-term, therefore, not everything can be measured in the same way. Previously it was found that organizations like Samaritan's Purse and World Vision International measure success through the number of children they've found homes for and by how they've helped families financially. It was found that Youth With A Mission, however, measures success by the number of countries in which they've reached out to. They have a goal of 180, meaning they are able to visually see the progress of their mission (Youth With A Mission, 2020). This agrees with the research found in this study, because it shows that different organizations have a different measure for success depending on their own specific goals and experience.

## **Future Research**

Other researchers should consider how we can find people with these specific skill sets. Where are the best places to look? Another thought to consider is what is the best training method for teams? Is there a one size fits all method or does training need to change based on team members, experience, or places? Many of the respondents mentioned that the leaders and those on the missionary teams must be gifted or must know their giftings. For future research, it may be important to consider how we know someone's "giftings" or how we can know if someone is "gifted" for leadership. Lastly, it may be important to consider diversity among men and women in mission work. It seems from this research that many women are involved in missionary work and not as many men, but this may not be the case. If this is the case, it would be a good idea to research ways that more men can be encouraged to take on more roles in missionary work.

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