



## **Leadership Roles in Overcoming the Challenges of Multiculturalism in Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation in Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

In any organization, whether private or public, the ability to achieve the set goals depends on the leadership skills of the management. Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation (CDMF) in Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria is a multicultural and non-governmental organization (NGO) that seeks to take the gospel of Jesus to the unreached people and also engage in rural development of the community. This paper aims to investigate the relevance and the effects of good leadership in a multicultural setting like the CDMF. This paper researches how leaders of CDMF explore leadership training, skills, and styles to annex workers of various cultural backgrounds and perspectives to work in unity and harmony towards organizational goals and effectiveness in non-governmental organizations. This paper looks at why the staff of this Non-Governmental Organization in Nigeria, keep holding the fort, despite the problems that multiculturalism presents in today's globalization. The focus is to research, analyse, and make suggestions on how the NGO overcomes the cultural shock its face in the process of carrying out its mandates among people of different cultures. Transformational Leadership Theory is the theory deployed for the study. The central research question is: Why did the work of Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation (CDMF) spread beyond Mubi Local Government Area of Adamawa State Nigeria to Cameroon and Chad despite being an NGO? The methodology deployed was Rigorous literature review on leadership, missionary work, and challenges of multiculturalism organizations. Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria was used as a case study. The finding was that servant-leadership style deployed by the organization negates the challenges of multiculturalism in non-governmental organizations. It is recommended that workers in a new community should be encouraged to learn the language and the norms of the



host community to know why the people behave the way they behave. The understanding of cultural intelligence theory and the application of it, help the missionaries to overcome culture shock in various communities. In conclusion, the ultimate goal of an organization will be achieved if the right leadership style is deployed.

**Keywords:** Leadership Roles, Multiculturalism, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Culture Shock

## **Introduction**

The world business situation today is characterized by cultural diversity. The world has become a global village, so organizations are becoming multicultural and diversity is becoming very pronounced, obvious, and necessary. Leaders of multicultural organizations are faced with the challenges of managing interpersonal differences between their employees as a result of cultural differences. In any organization, whether private, public, for-profit, or non-profit the success of the organization in achieving the set goals depends on how the leadership team effectively manages the interpersonal differences. According to Nguyen & Umasshankar, (2020), leaders can help to promote inclusivity, understanding and respect among diverse cultural groups. Man is endowed with inherent behaviour, variation in our behavioural endowment stimulates us to react to situations in different ways. Leaders, therefore, must possess the ability to know why workers behave the way they behave. Leaders should possess the ability to diffuse tension among workers.

Cultural diversity and emotional diversity, if not properly managed can cause communication gap in a multicultural setting. Cultural diversity can include ethnicity, religious belief, gender, race, language, worldview perspective, and nationality to mention just a few. The worldview of an individual depends on his or her past background. A man thinks along the way he has been taught to view other people's language, dress, or mode of dressing. If he has been taught that his race is the most superior, on the planet, he tends to look down on any other human beings. He tends to relegate whosoever he meets to second-class citizens even his



bosses. He feels superior to everyone else, his juniors, colleagues, or senior officers around him.

Cultural diversity, if not properly addressed by well-trained managers with good leadership skills, can break the organization's peace and harmony of staff. It can reduce effectiveness and efficiency. It reduces staff performance and invariably production level. Thus, leaders' roles in a multicultural environment are crucial in reducing interpersonal conflicts. Leveraging cultural diversity to bring about good understanding and promoting peace is a good quality of leaders.

This paper seeks to discuss leadership quality in the context of cultural diversity in a multicultural organization at Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation. It analyses the cultural perspectives of workers and brings arguments on why they behave the way they behave. It suggests what the leaders of multicultural organizations should do to enhance staff effectiveness.

### **Historical background of Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation (CDMF)**

Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation (CDMF) started in 1985, when two young university graduates "claimed" to have been called to reach the Fali tribe of Mubi Hills in Adamawa State with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, having met in a school of mission. One is from Ibadan, Oyo State while the other is from Edo State. Two of them after their missionary training moved to the then Gongola state in "obedience" to God's instruction. Some Fali people were animists, particularly, the Julvu tribe and they live on the Mandara Mountain. This is the mountain between the borders of Nigeria and Cameroon. This couple later got married in 1985. Fali people engaged in farming and rearing of animals. At that time, they were separated from all kinds of social amenities and civilization. On climbing Mandara Mountain the first cultural shock that met this couple was that the women were wearing leaves. They also had communication problems because the Fali people neither spoke English nor Hausa since there was no established school in their community. With determination, this couple learned the Hausa language. With the



help of an interpreter, they communicated the gospel to the Fali people. Soon, the news went round and more people came to join hands with this couple. Apart from the fact that Christians from other tribes came to join them, the work also grew to other neighbouring tribes. Today, the work has become multicultural with converts not only from the Fali tribe but also among the Higgi people in the Michika local Government Area, Nzain people in the Maiha local Government area, Bana people in Cameroon, and even as far as north and south of Chad. This work has staff from various parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. This is with the attended challenges that multicultural organizations face. Cultural diversity is very pronounced in Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation. (CDMF). The staff is of various cultural backgrounds, some are Yoruba, some are Marggi, some are Bura and others are from eastern Nigeria.

The preaching engagement of CDMF has extended beyond Nigeria. Missionaries have been sent to the Runga people of northeast Chad and the Bana people of northwest of Cameroon. This development has made cultural diversity very vast and pronounced.

### **Definition of Some Terms**

It is necessary to define some terms here:

1. **Multiculturalism:** Hayes (2023) opined, "Multicultural Organization has a workforce that includes people from diverse backgrounds across all departments and which offers them equal opportunity for input and advancement within the company." On the other hand, a culture can be defined as the total ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. Multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of diverse cultural groups that differs in language, religion, customs, and beliefs, among other things (Kumar & Ismail, 2021). The beliefs, culture, and worldview of employees in a multicultural organization have been accumulated, learned, and practiced for many years. Neutralizing these beliefs might be pretty difficult, yet every leader knows that all members of



a team must work in good understanding of one another to make their efforts productive.

2. *Non-governmental Organization (NGO)*: The term, non-governmental organization (NGO), refers to a “voluntary group of individuals or organizations, usually not affiliated with any government, that is formed to provide services or to advocate a public policy” (Karns, 2024). NGOs are sometimes referred to as Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) since these organizations also use money to run the organization. They can generate income but the profit generated is not distributed to the directors.
3. *Culture Shock*: “Culture shock refers to feelings of uncertainty, confusion or anxiety that people may experience when moving to a new country or experiencing a new culture or surroundings” (Segal, 2022). Culture shock is normal and can be stressful. The more a person prepares for culture shock when moving to a different environment, the easier to adjust to the culture.
4. *Leadership Role*: A rigorous book review has shown that leadership is not easy to define. The fields of Sociology, Psychology and various management fields have various interpretations of the word leadership according to the perspectives of their profession. However, leadership is a noun that comes from a verb “to lead” meaning, to go in front of others and to influence others by example, by words, and by action. “It is an act by either word or deed to influence behaviour toward a desired end.” Maxwell (2013) and Owen (2012) define leadership as influencing others. Thus, leadership is the ability to make others do what the leader must have loved to do. Northouse (2019) argues that leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Jackson and Parry (2008) describe leadership as a process during which leaders use their skills and knowledge to lead and direct a group of employees toward the desired direction that is relevant to their organizational goals and objectives. In this regard, it is good to note that the role of a leader cannot be over-emphasized in guiding his followers to the right destination. It is also good to note



that to lead, it is not necessary to have formal authority or position. This researcher has seen a situation where a team leader is functional only in the classroom but someone else guides when the team gets to the field. Leadership is the ability to attract people and motivate them to complete a piece of task. Northouse (2009) states that leaders who possess strong leadership skills can influence others to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization. These leadership skills include the ability to set goals, to encourage commitments by his actions, to build team understanding, to encourage team participation, and to ensure good results.

### **Theoretical Framework**

One theoretical framework that has been deployed to this research is Transformational Leadership Theory. This theory was proposed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers to achieve a higher level of performance by promoting values such as integrity, trust, and ethical behaviour. Another theory is the concept of Servant Leadership. According to Greenleaf (1977), servant leaders prioritize the needs of others and aim to serve the common good. Eva et al (2019) found that servant-leadership style resulted in increased employee motivation and improved team performance. These theories are used to examine the roles of leaders.

### **Challenges of Multiculturalism**

In a multicultural organization, prevalent and major challenges are:

- *Cultural Clashes*: Cultural clashes can lead to misunderstandings between workers and this can cause very strong conflict and social fragmentation.
- *Communication Challenges*: Because people speak different languages, this language barrier can lead to poor social interaction.
- *Relationships*: Damage relationships between workers of two different cultures due to pride, prejudice, and discrimination.



- *Identity Conflicts:* these occur when people live under the influence of multiple cultural identities. Balancing one's cultural upbringing with the multicultural norms of the community can be a rigorous exercise.

### **Multiculturalism Nature of Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation (CDMF)**

Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation exists in three different countries and eight Different cultures. The missionaries are also from different cultural backgrounds. The nature and goal of this work is to win souls to the kingdom of God. This goal is noble. So, missionaries come with the mind-set of achieving the prime goal of the organization. From the onset, multiculturalism is valued by the leadership because it is the best effort to forestall segregation and sectionalism.

The goal of the leadership is to raise leaders who will thrive in the cultural diversity of the Mission fields. The tribes are interwoven in their culture and intermarriage persists because of their closeness in their geographical locations. The missionaries who are from different cultural upbringings must not see any culture as the best or else, culture will emerge as their main topic instead of preaching the liberating word of God.

### **Leadership Style of Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation (CDMF)**

Christ's Disciples Missionary Foundation as earlier mentioned is both a non-governmental and non-profit organization. The goal is not to make a profit but to win souls through the preaching of the gospel. From the onset, the leaders prioritize serving others and teach their followers to do the same. Out of many leadership styles available, some of the styles this organization uses include:

1. Laissez-faire leadership style
2. Democratic-participative leadership style
3. Manipulative-inspirational leadership style
4. Benevolent-autocratic leadership style





5. Autocratic-bureaucratic leadership style

6. Servant-leadership style

The leaders of the organization, looking critically at the main goal of the organization decided to put servant-leadership style as their priority. Servant-leadership style has been deployed by various organizations. Parris and Peachey (2013) found that servant-leadership positively influenced the organization's performance and employee satisfaction. In another corporate setting, the study found out that the servant leadership style increased employee motivation and improved team performance (Eva et al., 2019). This leadership style focuses on empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, and commitment to the growth of people (Spears, 2010). This leadership style contrasts with traditional leadership styles, where the leader's primary focus is the thriving of their organization, often at the expense of employees (Northouse (2018). In Gomez (2022)'s words "Leaders with this style serve their team and organization first. They don't prioritize their objectives." The leadership empowers the missionaries by training them to accept the culture of their host community. Accepting their culture includes, eating their food, dressing like them, learning their language, and respecting them. The organizational goal of CDMF is to win souls by preaching. The heathen will not listen to a new message if the norm of their culture is relegated. Humility and mutual respect are virtues that give servant leaders honour before their followers. Clement et al. (2011) put it this way "Mutual respect is a balanced give-and-take relationship that should exist between people because it is the only kind of relationship that helps them to co-exist peacefully and happily." Respect is given to cultural Norms whether within the multicultural missionary team or the norm of the culture of the host community where the missionary lives. "The Norm of culture is their way of life and their behaviours as dictated by the set rules and regulations of that society. It is the total of all the expectations, values, and aspirations of any given society" (Clement et al., 2011). Since servant leaders prioritize the goal of the organization, they can endure the culture shock of their host community. They do not laugh at the





perceived mistake of individuals since that behaviour might be the norm in their culture. They listen with empathy and must not be anti-native. They investigate why the natives behave the way they behave, identify the good part of the culture, and adjust their own life even if it is against their own culture. Looking for how to drive home his message by contextualizing the message to the culture of the native land.

### **Servant Leadership Style is Transformational**

Understudying modus operandi and the missionary activities of CDMF, the researcher found out that every leader concentrates on the development of his followers. The team leader prioritizes the welfare of the team members therefore, he can make them good followers because they believe his decision is in their favour first. So, they obey his instructions. They trust him, take risks in their work, and become efficient and committed employees. These followers are empowered and they grow to become future servant leaders.

Teamwork is enhanced because everyone seeks the actualization of the organization's goals. Team collaboration is their greatest focus, everyone listens to innovative ideas and is ready to learn. Every positive idea leads to an increase in the stock of knowledge of every member of the team.

A servant leader makes the working environment conducive and employees feel valued and important. This leads to high retention of employees and increases in productivity. Missionaries face the work of evangelism with little effects of the culture shock of a new environment. Everyone wants to belong to a winning team. A servant leader puts trust in his team and the team respects their leader. He has not come to lord it over his team but to raise future leaders. A servant leader is constantly working himself out of his station by quickly raising indigenous leaders that will take over from him so he can raise more leaders in another station.

With this transformational attitude in every leader, CDMF staff was able to quickly spread servant leadership ideology beyond the Fali tribe and to neighbouring tribes in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad.



## **Multiculturalism and Sense of Ownership**

The training arm of CDMF is structured to train leaders who will reproduce themselves. Theories of incarnation, identification, selection, delegation, and reproduction are emphasized. Trained leaders are sent to the natives to raise future leaders in the community. In other words, they are to transform the people and the environment. The method was to:

- Incarnate – to live with them in their environment. This gives them a sense of belonging and inclusiveness.
- Identify – means to relate with them in their cultural setting. Learn it, understand it, and practice it without prejudices.
- Select – means worthy leaders are to be chosen and trained as future servant leaders. The natives know from the beginning that they are worthy future leaders. All are allowed to excel, grow, and lead.
- Delegate – means give power to worthy members of the community as they grow in fulfilling the uttermost goal of the organization
- Reproduce – the result is that every leader working in the organization should be able to raise servant leaders who will be able to reproduce others.

This method gives every member of the organization a sense of belonging and ownership. No culture is seen as superior to another. Communication is done cross-culturally from one region to another.

## **Encouragement of Culture Understanding from One Ethnic Group to Another**

The philosophy of cross-cultural communication is that no culture is perfect and no culture is totally bad. Development of cultural competence is encouraged and taught to all missionaries. Cultural competence is the ability to understand, appreciate and respect the differences and similarities between different cultures (Fawcett & Garton, 2020). All cultures have functional equivalents. “These are actions or expressions in one culture which have the same meaning but



different forms of expression in another culture” (Clement et al., 2011). CDMF missionaries are accepted in every culture because of their understanding of functional equivalents in cultures. They learn the language of every tribe, study their culture, and contextualize the gospel. So, they win the hearts of the community members fast.

## **Conclusion**

Multiculturalism is becoming very popular because of globalization, yet it has benefits and numerous challenges. Any organization that wants to enjoy the benefits, must work round to overcome the challenges. One of the ways to overcome the challenges is to run the right kind of leadership style. The ultimate goal of the organization will be achieved if the right leadership style is deployed.

## **Recommendations**

The servant Leadership style of administration has been tested among rural dwellers of Fali people in Mubi Local Government Area of Adamawa State Nigeria. The community has been transformed economically, socially, and spiritually. Therefore, these recommendations are given here:

1. Cultural Diversity can be a blessing if the Leaders have high cultural intelligence and are properly channelled.
2. For effective communication, workers in a new community should be encouraged to learn the language and the norms of the host community to know why people behave the way they behave.
3. The goal of every organization should be properly organized to know which leadership style will fit the management of the organization
4. Hostility will be reduced to the barest minimum if the culture of a group of people is not relegated by other cultures in the same community.



5. Intercultural competence should be developed through training for workers meant to work in multicultural organizations.

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*Lead City Journal of Religions and Intercultural Communication*  
(ISSN 3043-4416)  
*The Journal of the Department of Religious and Intercultural  
Studies, Faculty of Arts, Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria*  
*Volume 1, Number 1, July 2024*

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