

# Looking at leadership in contemporary organisations religion essay



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Today, perhaps no figure has come to symbolize undiluted goodness, piety, and compassion more than the small, elderly Albanian nun Agnes Bojaxhiu-known to millions as Mother Teresa. The most highly respected and most fascinating woman in the twentieth century, Mother Teresa (August 26, 1910 – September 5, 1997) is a humanitarian from Macedonia; born to a co-owner of a construction company, she led a comfortable life while growing up. But, at the age of eighteen she became a nun and joined Sisters of Loreto, Dublin, Ireland and later soon left to north-eastern India. She took the name of “ Teresa” in 1931. She saved lives and changed them by sheer force of her faith and determination. She is a charismatic leader who became a missionary and a nun to spread the love of Christ and was devoted to be love in action on this earth. She founded Society of Missionaries, Missionaries of Charity, which provided food for the needy and operated schools, youth centres, hospitals, orphanages and shelters for lepers and dying poor in many countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia. The great servant of humanity, Mother Teresa by her service for the human welfare with dedication and selflessness is recognised by the world and has received honours and awards like Medal of Freedom, Pope John XXIII Peace Prize (1971), Nobel Peace Prize (1979), honorary US citizenship and Padmashree award (1962), Nehru Prize for her promotion of international peace and understanding (1972), etc. She has nursed and helped the mentally ill, “ poorest of the poor” in India, the unwanted and the unloved, countless elderly, the crippled and HIV positive victims. She gave the world a moral paradigm, bridging religious and cultural divides. She motivated through her words.

“ Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless.”(Mother Teresa)

“ What I do you cannot do, but what you do, I cannot do. The needs are great and, and none of us including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things with great love, and together we can do small things wonderful.”(Mother Teresa)

Even though at the age of eighty when she suffered heart problems, she continued travelling and working. Her words (1989), “ My doctors are always telling me that I must not travel so much, that I must slow down, but I have all eternity to rest and there is so much still to do. Life is not worth living unless it is lived for others.”

Now the leadership style of Mother Teresa and the effectiveness is discussed in detail with respect to certain leadership theories like Great man theory, trait theory, behaviour theory, contingency theory, etc.

### **Great man theory**

Ancient schools of thought have brought an ever growing literature on the leadership of Mother Teresa. All her works have proved that she is very charismatic. Great man theory says that Mother Teresa was born with servant leadership skills that helped her to influence and support many people in this world. She was a great woman with innate divine qualities from childhood onwards and this is evident from the number of followers she has to testify her greatness. One proof is at the age of twelve; she strongly felt the call of God.

## **Trait theory**

While considering the trait theory (1920s), we see that Mother Teresa had many traits and characteristics that affected her effective leadership. These traits have helped her to make an influence relation with the followers to make changes and outcomes that reflects the shared purpose of the society, i. e., social welfare. This has even created social commitment in the minds of other people. She had cardinal traits of religious service that practically defined her life. The most pervasive trait is her charitableness. She focused on altruism; that is, benefiting others, even to her detriment. Her personality traits and characteristics related to her effective people oriented leadership are: openness and frankness that helped her to create a powerful network of people from all walks of life, strong willpower that helped her to transform her vision into actions no matter how long it takes, her alertness and eloquence, trustworthiness, honesty, self-confidence, emotional stability, high tolerance for frustration, pleasantness, persistence against obstacles, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, social skills, cooperativeness, inspirational, consistent words and action, passion for people, flexibility, adaptability, courage, internal locus of control, high energy, enthusiasm, empathy, warmth, integrity, sociability, etc. These have influenced her followers; helped in creating changes in people and an interpersonal influence through communication and persuasion. Indirectly, this has caused followers to respond or act to a shared direction of social welfare.

## **Behaviour theory**

Considering behaviour theory (1950s) that looks at what the leader does, Mother Teresa is a democratic leader with consideration leadership style

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(Ohio State studies); she creates an environment of emotional support, friendliness, trust, warmth, treats people equal, does personal favour and is willing to make change. She gives importance to interpersonal relationship and satisfaction of each needy people. She aligns and mobilises people to one direction to care and inspires others. She has great concern for the people and great concern for task, which is her goal or mission, 'to serve and to do God's will'; the social welfare (Ohio and Michigan studies). Based on the works of Bolivian psychiatrist Oscar Ichazo (1960), leadership theory breaks down the styles into different categories. According to this, Mother Teresa is considered as a mentor because she is compassionate, caring, highly empathetic person, who sees best in others, gains satisfaction from helping to develop others, is motivated by a desired to be loved, appreciated and needed; never says 'no' to others and is a symbol of untiring commitment.

According to Gardner (1989), we can identify main roles of Mother Teresa as a leader; namely, affirming values, motivating, envisioning goals, explaining, achieving workable unity, renewing, representing the group and serving as a symbol. She is a charismatic leader with great vision.

According to Bass and Avolio (1993), transformational leadership is concerned with engaging hearts and minds of others for which concern, trust and facilitation is needed. The skills needed are related to establishment of long term vision, developing others, empowering people to control themselves, gathering workers in a religious order, challenging the culture to change, has individualised consideration and coaching (Bass and Avolio, 1993). A transformational leader has ability to inspire, to aspire and to <https://assignbuster.com/looking-at-leadership-in-contemporary-organisationsreligion-essay/>

achieve; more than they thought was possible. Mother Teresa had charisma and had ability inspire members of her order to transcend their own self-interest to achieve the vision. She is an example of transformational leadership, a model for helping others aspire to and attain high levels of performance for organization and themselves. Here, power of leadership comes from creating trust and understanding (Avolio and Bass, 1994).

### **Situational theory**

Situational theory tells how the situation and context influence the effectiveness of leadership behaviour. Mother Teresa always maintains an interpersonal relation with her co-workers. The successful use of her situational leadership relies on effectiveness of the communication components like listening, communication expectations, delegating, etc. According to Hersey and Blanchard, leadership style can be adjusted to accommodate the readiness of the followers. She always motivated her followers through her words and action. Situational variables are focused for effective leadership in each circumstance at that time. Having an interpersonal relation with each person working with her and the people being served, she was able to act in a way that motivates them to do things that benefits the whole society. Her followers always have a high readiness level and there a participating and supportive style of leadership was preferred by Mother Teresa.

### **Contingency theory**

According to contingency theory, leadership style and effectiveness are contingent to people and situations. Mother Teresa has been described as integral leader who “ requires a multi-disciplinary, multi-level and <https://assignbuster.com/looking-at-leadership-in-contemporary-organisationsreligion-essay/>

developmental approach” (Pauchant, 2005, p. 211). There is a clear relationship between herself as a leader, her followers (poor, ill, rejected and the nursing nuns), and the situation. Mother Teresa is people-oriented according to Fiedler’s contingency model and she matches her leadership style according to the situation.

## **Influence theories and relational theory**

The influence theory tells about the influence process between leaders and followers. Mother Teresa is an influential leader with charismatic leadership. This is evident from the number of followers Mother Teresa have. Her personality traits and inspirational communication style has influenced many people to move towards a single mission.

Relational theory (1970s) tells how leaders and followers interact and influence one another. Leadership involves people in relationship, influence change, shared purpose and responsibility. Mother Teresa is relationship-oriented leadership. She maintains an interpersonal relation with her co-workers and this helps her to achieve her goal.

## **Effective leadership of Mother Teresa**

Mother Teresa is an ethical leader who has personal mastery, honest communication and is aware of diversity dimensions and multicultural issues. Her ethical values and morals are the key secrets of her success. Her values are social responsibility, ethical behaviour, community contribution, responsibility and freedom, etc. She encourages, serves and develops others by being humble with a servant spirit; possesses humility, maintains concern for greater good, fulfils commitments, shows courage to stand up for what is

right, takes responsibility, is straightforward, consistent, transparent and honest, strives for fairness, shows respect for each individual; gives importance to freedom, liberty and equality; has care for others, treats everyone with dignity, respect and fairness; always does the right thing, put others first, sets an example she wants others to live by and has no fear. She can 'walk the talk' and thus creates a trust in her followers. She gives importance to cultural values also and this has helped her to gather people from different parts of the world and to become an effective leader.

Mother Teresa is a charismatic leader with social, personal and divine charismatics. She has a great vision and mission to serve and to do God's will; is persistent, socially responsible, enthusiastic, energetic and optimistic woman with an inspirational communication style. She has strong ethical values and morals. And by her inspirational communication skill and socio-economic behaviour, she could gather many people to work with her to achieve high performance through shared mission and collective responsibility. She is a leader with interactive leadership style as she develops personal relationships with her followers, share power and information, empower, and strive to enhance other's feelings of self-worth. Considering the Hofstede's dimensions, we see that Mother Teresa supports low power distance, collectivism and very low uncertainty avoidance.

### **Servant leadership:**

Good leaders are seen servants at first. In Greenleaf's seminal essay, 'The servant as leader', he describes the servant-leader as someone who begins with a natural feeling that they want to serve, to serve first. A servant is who the person is at the core of his or her being. Conscious choice then brings <https://assignbuster.com/looking-at-leadership-in-contemporary-organisationsreligion-essay/>



the servant to aspire to lead (Greenleaf, 1977, 1991). Mother Teresa is a leader who transcends self-interest to help the needs of others, provide opportunities for others to gain materially and emotionally and to help others grow. She had socialised motives only and is a perfect servant leader with ethical values. She has all the attributes which are ten servant leadership characteristics given by Greenleaf, namely general and self-awareness, listening, individualized conceptualisation, empathy, foresight, healing oneself and ones relationship to others, reliance on persuasion, commitment to growth of others, stewardship and a concern for building community. She listens to what is said and unsaid as it helped her to hear the inner voice. Being a leader, she serves her followers without any self-interest. So, followers respond to the leaders as they are proven and trusted servants.

At occasion when Mother Teresa was awarded Nobel prize for peace in 1979, she stated, " I am grateful to receive it in the name of the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, and of all those who feel unwanted, unloved and uncared for throughout society" (" Mother Teresa, Winner of 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, Dies at Age 87," 1997, p. 86).

There are main four things that stand out in the leadership context. First, to lead is to influence people by actions, beliefs and feeling for others. Second, leaders will have clear idea of what they want to achieve and why. Third, they become visible when innovative responses are needed. Fourth, a good leader will have many followers. Mother Teresa does have all these four things and she is an effective leader. She leads through example. She was effective without saying anything. Her words,

“ God is a friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch the souls.”(Mother Teresa)

We can relate Mother Teresa’s leadership to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In Maslow’s (1971) later years, he theorized the highest level of self-actualization goes to a higher level ‘ self-transcendence’, which carries to spiritual level. Mother Teresa is an example. It recognizes human needs for creativity, ethics, spirituality and compassion. We are machines or animals without this transcendent or spiritual sense. There are several reasons that made her an effective leader. They are as the following. She always did what she loved to serve the poor and never accepted any limitations in her life. Her efforts to read and learn gave her wisdom and greater depth. She never feared to ask what she needed and had a clear idea what she wanted to accomplish. She led by being an example. She was cheerful even when she didn’t feel like that, learnt by experience, cared about those in need, stayed humble, never let age slow her down, had a great vision and ethical use of power, always spoke from her heart and was consistent in words and actions. This led to her success and made her an effective leader. Her success can be measured by her faithfulness to God, her calling and all mankind; her ideals and morals; lives she saved and touched and the humble tactics that left effects on society. Her character with lots of good values, vision, empathy, inspiration and trustworthiness are the key characteristics of the effective leadership of Mother Teresa.

## **Power and influence**

### **CONCLUSION**

Mother Teresa is an effective leader. Her strong positive qualities are as follows: strong belief in her mission which is evident in continued practicing her calling even when her name and organization were opposed; self-confidence seen when she even dared to approach great supporters and obtain powerful allies as many philanthropists and pope; perseverance as she devoted all her energy and time to her vocation even in her eighties; discipline as she led by example, started early and worked late; consistence as she maintained faith and continued to believe in God throughout disparities she witnessed; motivational as she encouraged rejected ones to dare facing life again; empathetic as her compassion for less fortunate made her an admired personality; courageous as she expanded her organization to unfamiliar territories; honesty; visionary and communicative. The criticisms and her negative qualities like intolerant or having little patience regarding negligence from her co-workers, disregard of her own family as she never returned to Albania, being not open to other perspectives like proponents of artificial contraception and abortion, etc. and the main criticised point about her calculation towards her mission as her preference for saving souls for her religion to saving lives, can never overshadow her great achievements.

These negative qualities in a way helped her to be an effective leader. She always proved inspirational to many, attracting believers, followers and volunteers wherever she went. She invited people to make adaptive changes by learning new things and discarding the old ones and thereby work for the social welfare. With the responsibility to develop an initiative and creativity

to maximum in the society, she was able to make significant and visible impact. This proves her to be an effective leader.

The reasons why I respect Mother Teresa is because of her acts of kindness, her consistence in words and actions, her love for the world, her devotion to God, her heart for the poor and her willingness to serve. And, I wish to portray these characteristics of the effective leader Mother Teresa in my day-to-day life.