


Refining a paradigm of missional leadership

**Author:**Kirk J. Franklin¹ **Affiliation:**¹Melbourne School of Theology, Wantirna, Australia**Corresponding author:**Kirk Franklin,
kfranklin@mst.edu.au**Dates:**

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This article explores how the author's empirical research of 'leadership clusters' can be integrated with Nelus Niemandt's triologue of church, culture and biblical narrative to produce a concise paradigm of missional leadership. Franklin's (a student of Niemandt) development of leadership clusters was derived from global missional leaders' philosophies. To strengthen the biblical foundation, the study explores shepherd-servant-steward metaphors of leadership. Together, these enrich the understanding of (global) missional leadership by highlighting characteristics such as participatory engagement, adaptive responsiveness, relational integrity and transformative action. The integration of biblical models with (global) missional leadership paradigms ensures an integrated approach that aligns with God's mission while addressing the complexities of globalised contexts.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study contributes to missiology, theology and leadership studies by integrating biblical leadership models with contemporary missional leadership paradigms. This intradisciplinary research bridges missiology with global leadership studies and organisational leadership. By engaging with theological and leadership frameworks, the article offers a comprehensive model that is contextually relevant with a biblical basis and missiological direction, equipping leaders for effective participation in the *missio Dei* across diverse contexts.

Keywords: participatory; transformative; adaptive; relational; discerning; empowering; accountability; missional leadership.

Introduction

Reimagining leadership paradigms within the context of the *missio Dei* is important to contemporary missiological discourse. As the global church deepens its awareness of its participatory role in God's mission, missional leadership emerges as a model for navigating the complexities of an ever-changing church and world.

Nelus Niemandt has been central to understanding missional leadership, emerging from his concept of the 'triologue' – 'the discerning interaction between church, culture and biblical narrative' (Niemandt 2013b:9). The triologue functions as a collaborative space in which the church seeks to understand and participate in what the Holy Spirit is doing. Rather than a static model, it is a Spirit-led process of communal discernment, characterised by what Niemandt describes as an 'engagement in, with, against and for the world' (Niemandt 2012:9).

Missional leadership defined by Niemandt involves 'the transformation of people and institutions to participate, through meaningful relations and in the power of the Spirit, in God's mission' (Niemandt 2013b:25). This leadership embodies the relational and transformational capacities necessary to navigate the dynamic interplay of the triologue's three components:

- *Church:* The church's communal life is Spirit-led, relational and orientated towards active participation in the *missio Dei*.
- *Culture:* Engagement with culture is adaptive and discerning – neither retreating from nor uncritically conforming to cultural norms but seeking transformative interaction.
- *Biblical narrative:* Leadership remains anchored in Scripture, allowing the biblical story to inform and guide contextual practices.

These components do not function in isolation; they interact fluidly, enabling the ecumenical global church to engage the world in collaborative, contextually relevant, Spirit-empowered and biblically faithful ways.

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Reframing missional leadership

This study explores how mission leadership embodies a paradigm shift in leadership theory and practice. Paradigms serve as cognitive frameworks with fresh perspectives that open pathways to new approaches. In this case, the shift challenges linear assumptions that leaders can shape the future through 'clear vision statements and large-scale organisational interventions' (Niemandt 2019b:200). Instead, missional leadership invites more adaptive, relational and Spirit-led approaches to leadership practice.

Niemandt has been at the forefront of scholarly efforts to articulate this concept, offering insights into how leadership should function within the context of the *missio Dei*. His prolific engagement provides a crucial foundation for understanding how leadership can be theologically informed and practically effective in diverse contexts.

By examining Niemandt's writings about missional leadership and excerpts from Kirk J. Franklin's PhD thesis, *A Paradigm of Global Missional Leadership* (2016), which Niemandt supervised, this study synthesises their contributions. It seeks to clarify the value of missional leadership within the global church in service of the *missio Dei*.

Classifying missional leadership

Understanding how Niemandt frames missional leadership poses the questions: How does he conceptualise missional leadership? And which existing leadership theories or models inform his approach? Responding involves engaging with the crowded landscape of leadership models and theories. However, John Dugan offers a helpful differentiation of their classification (Dugan 2017:12):

- *Informal theory*: An untested, often subconscious and personal belief about how one's worldview shapes leadership.
- *Formal theory*: An evidence-based proposition tested and validated to explain a specific leadership phenomenon.
- *Model*: A visual or descriptive representation of a concept or process not necessarily supported by empirical research.
- *Taxonomy*: A classification system that organises information about leadership paradigms for learning and discovery, with or without empirical testing.
- *Framework*: A conceptual or philosophical structure that presents abstract ideas, typically guiding thought and interpretation rather than empirical testing.

In *Missional Leadership*, Niemandt acknowledges the value of Gayle C. Avery's taxonomy of four leadership paradigms (Niemandt 2019b:79–82):

- *Classical leadership* (antiquity to 1970s): Hierarchical and authority-driven structures.
- *Transactional leadership* (1970s to mid-1980s): Leadership through exchanges and reward systems.

- *Visionary leadership* (the mid-1980s to 2000): Focus on a shared vision and motivating followers.
- *Organic leadership* (beyond 2000): Adaptive, relational and responsive to complexity.

Avery emphasises that these paradigms are 'illustrative points along several continua' rather than rigid distinct categories (Avery 2004:18). Using Dugan's distinctions, Avery's work could be classified as a model, taxonomy or framework rather than a tested theoretical framework.

In particular, Niemandt observes that missional and organic leadership share mutual support and interaction in responding to rapidly changing contexts (Niemandt 2019b:81). Organic leadership is characterised by (Avery 2004:26):

- *Decentralised leadership*: Authority is not concentrated in a single leader, allowing for greater innovation and agility, especially amid technological advancements.
- *Boundaryless structures*: Leadership transcends traditional organisational confines, enabling responsiveness to the needs of those served.
- *Cultural agility*: Leaders operate in culturally diverse environments, requiring the incorporation of multiple perspectives for effective solutions.
- *Knowledge-based leadership*: Innovation is supported by a highly educated workforce prioritising continuous learning.

Characteristics of missional leadership

As already stated, Niemandt's definition of missional leadership is succinct: 'the transformation of people and institutions to participate, through meaningful relations and in the power of the Spirit, in God's mission' (Niemandt 2016:86). While it may give a foundational understanding, it does not fully capture the richness and depth of thought evident in Niemandt's extensive writings on the topic.

Through an interdisciplinary approach, Niemandt's model of missional leadership draws upon diverse concepts and frameworks. His work navigates various leadership discourses without overwhelming the reader, offering a comprehensive and accessible framework. This is a synopsis of its characteristics grouped in the following four domains:

Participatory

At its core, missional leadership is participatory. It reflects the *missio Dei*, 'the active presence of the Triune God in his creation and the life-changing invitation to participate in this mission of God' (Niemandt 2019a:155). Leadership is an act of involvement, embodying God's sending nature and enabling the global church to fulfil its calling in God's ongoing mission. Missional leadership is thus dynamic, multidimensional and inherently transformative. Leaders seek to understand where 'the Spirit is working'

(Niemandt 2013b:10) and join in God's transformative mission. This characteristic is marked by a deep spirituality and attentiveness to the Spirit's guidance in fostering life and fullness (Niemandt 2019b:71, 159, 216). Missional leaders 'encourage and ignite' community participation by modelling discernment and clarifying God's preferred future (Niemandt 2019b:123). Their leadership approach is not about imposing vision but facilitating communal discovery and engagement in God's mission. Missional leadership is also 'contextually sensitive', discerning 'the Spirit's activity' within cultural, social and spiritual realities. It is 'a pragmatic missionary identity' that engages the unique dynamics of each context, enabling leaders to respond faithfully to local challenges and opportunities (Niemandt 2024:198). Missional leadership models seen in the New Testament's 'communities of witnesses' and their leaders who had the 'authority and power to serve... were gifts of the Holy Spirit', empowering, convening and cultivating environments for communal discernment (Niemandt 2019b:63, 72). Consequently, leadership is connected to God's mission of holistic transformation.

Transformative

Transformation is both the goal and the process of missional leadership. It begins with the personal transformation in the leader, extends to the church and reaches the broader context (Niemandt 2013a:57). Through the Spirit's empowerment of the gift of leadership, missional leaders ignite cultural renewal, nurture covenantal communities and embrace the adaptive process of change (Niemandt 2019b:204–208). A vibrant spirituality sustains missional leaders. Missional leadership embodies 'a spirituality of the road', embracing the unpredictability of following the Spirit's leading (Niemandt 2013b:21). Based upon the kenotic (self-emptying) example of Christ, missional leadership embodies humility, presence and sacrificial love (Niemandt 2019b:92–93). Such leadership facilitates the flourishing of life in all its fullness, reflecting the incarnational nature of God's mission (Niemandt 2019b:96). Missional leadership calls the global church to transformative action, often emerging from vulnerable or marginalised contexts (Niemandt 2019b:218). It involves risk-taking, courageous truth-telling and challenging structures that hinder God's mission.

Relational

Effective missional leadership is founded upon relationships – the 'relational imperative' (Niemandt 2013b:12). Building networks of trust and collaboration, leaders create communities that reflect the relational nature of the Trinity (Niemandt 2019b:82, 123). Listening, adaptability and relational engagement enable leaders to respond contextually and faithfully. Leadership is not a solitary endeavour but a communal practice. Missional leadership empowers the faith community to engage in God's mission, embracing a distributed and participatory approach (Niemandt 2019b:192). Reflecting the relational nature of the Trinity, the church is a communion of loving relationships.

This polycentric (or multi-centred) model encourages shared responsibility and mutual participation (Breedt & Niemandt 2013:7). Ingenuity fuels innovation. A missional imagination is the capacity to envision God's ongoing creative work and inspire new possibilities (Niemandt 2019b:158–161). By reframing traditional paradigms and encouraging experimentation, leaders guide communities into unknown futures with wisdom drawn from past experiences. This is the 'art of map-making' with the aim to 'create new ways to move forward' (Niemandt 2019b:180).

Adaptive

Adaptability means that 'complex (missional) leaders enable rather than control' (Niemandt 2019b:200). Drawing from complexity theory (Plowman et al. 2007:344), leaders should create conditions for innovation and guide communities through unpredictable and rapidly changing environments. Adaptability enables the church to respond with agility rather than rigid structures. Missional leadership thrives while navigating to continuous (incremental, predictable, gradual) and discontinuous (disruptive, unpredictable, sudden) change. The latter demands a relinquishing of control and is essential in today's complex missional context (Niemandt 2019b:75–77). Leaders must 'adapt or die' while navigating ambiguity with courage and fostering solutions critical for the global church's future (Niemandt 2019b:76). Missional leadership challenges the status quo, often arising from the margins to provoke transformative change. Disruptors or 'traders' create fresh narratives and contextualise the gospel through participatory leadership models (Niemandt 2019b:192). There are also 'gatekeepers' who 'determine the flow of ideas' and 'the pace of transformation' (Niemandt 2019a:153). Courage and prophetic engagement are essential in confronting resistance and leading adaptive change (Niemandt 2019b:170). Related to this is how missional leadership interprets biblical narratives through an eschatological lens, inspiring communities to actively engage in God's unfolding future. It is adaptive, proactive and future-oriented, distinct from reactive or static leadership models. Leaders are guided by discerning questions such as 'What is God doing?' and 'What does God want to do?' (Niemandt 2022:21). Foreseeing 'God's continuing creation and recreation', missional leaders foster a vision embedded in hope and divine purpose (Niemandt 2019b:158). Storytelling and metaphor are powerful tools in missional leadership. Leaders shape identity, cast vision and inspire participation through narratives that connect with biblical stories and social imaginaries (Niemandt 2019b:141, 217). By creatively envisioning God's preferred future, leaders guide communities towards renewed purpose and mission.

The grouping of themes organised under four domains provides an overview of the richness of Niemandt's definition of missional leadership. These key characteristics extracted from Niemandt's work and summarised in this way enrich one's conceptualisation of missional leadership.

From hierarchy to participatory leadership

Niemandt's characteristics of missional leadership represent a paradigm shift. A paradigm serves as a framework or lens through which reality is perceived and understood. Franklin defines it as:

[A] frame of reference for constructing a way of thinking about a given topic; a lens for viewing a new reality; a tool that gives a new perspective to an older subject; or an academic device that enables new definitions in disciplinary activities involving techniques, methods or procedure. Franklin (2016) (p. 52)

Similarly, Laniak identifies equivalent terms such as frames of reference, cultural systems or models, mental models, schemas, frames, prisms, images or symbols, implicit theories, representations, cognitive maps and assumptions (Laniak 2006:35).

At its core, missional leadership challenges conventional hierarchical models that have dominated ecclesial leadership paradigms. Niemandt critiques these, noting they often rely on 'linear leadership' approaches – presuming that future outcomes can be shaped through 'clear vision statements and large-scale organisational interventions' (Niemandt 2019b:200). In contrast, missional leadership views the global church as a complex, living organisation established in the dynamic life of the Triune God. Such a theological reorientation shifts leadership from positional authority towards relational participation in the *missio Dei*, emphasising adaptability, community discernment and Spirit-empowered transformation.

A paradigm shift such as this is not just theoretical. It has practical implications, as illustrated in Kirk J. Franklin's doctoral research. Completed in 2016 at the University of Pretoria under Niemandt's supervision, the thesis titled, *A Paradigm for Global Mission Leadership: The Journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance* (Franklin 2016), explored how globalisation affected this mission agency's missional journey. The study examined how paradigm shift theory intersects with the *missio Dei*, offering a new model for global missional leadership. Conducted through qualitative inquiry, the research drew upon the journey of over 100 organisations from more than 60 nations, highlighting how mission agency leadership began to embody a global missional mindset (Franklin 2016:v).

Franklin (2016) acknowledges Niemandt's pivotal role in shaping the research:

I extend my gratitude to my promoter, Prof C.J.P. (Nelus) Niemandt at the University of Pretoria, for his support throughout the entire phase of my study. His advice informed me at each critical point of my research and he provided the type of suggestions, input and encouragement that I needed to guide and enhance my research. (p. 38)

This mentorship contributed to developing a global missional leadership framework that integrated Niemandt's insights

into missional leadership. Reflecting this influence, Franklin defines missional leadership as:

A paradigm shift from the Christendom concept of leadership through title and position to the equipping of all God's people to live and serve in his mission. Missional leadership is transformational because it 'ignites and drives change' that is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The focus starts with the 'inner transformation of the leader' (Niemandt 2013a:57). This leads to the release of an innovative spiritual gift of leadership to lead and equip the transformation of God's people so they may effectively participate in God's mission in their particular contexts. (Franklin 2016:38)

Franklin further emphasises the transformational quality of missional leadership, noting that leadership begins with personal and spiritual renewal in the leader, which catalyses broad community transformation. This process is not centred on positional authority but on equipping believers for active engagement in God's mission (Franklin 2016:122).

Building on Niemandt's work, Franklin identifies four characteristics of missional leadership (Franklin 2016:122):

- *Discerning* God's mission in the world in partnership with the Holy Spirit and the people of God.
- *Dwelling* in God's word and living within the narrative of Scripture.
- *Imagining* God's preferred future for the world.
- *Transforming* through the inner renewal of the leader and those they lead.

These elements show how missional leadership is not merely conceptual but practical – requiring Spirit-led discernment, a Scripture-immersed identity, imaginative visioning and a commitment to transformative action.

Exploring leadership philosophies

Franklin's study used grounded theory analysis to explore the leadership philosophies of Wycliffe Global Alliance's leadership team. The 'expert sampling' (Kumar 2011:207) the researcher used was people who had expertise in practising global mission leadership for at least five years. Based on authentic experiences, these philosophies reflected personal values, ideals and beliefs guiding leaders' actions. The diverse sample (53% Western countries, 47% Majority World) included 15 leaders with varied roles and significant global leadership experience.

Key phrases or statements were identified within each philosophy that were grouped and analysed. This followed 'abduction' in missiological research in empirical-theological praxis (Faix 2007:122). The process began with an actual situation, the key phrases from each philosophy, but to which there was no 'particular rule [or] result' that already existed. In the write-up of the analysis, reflections from the individual philosophies, along with observations from a literature review, combined with the researcher's own observations, were used to develop principles of global missional leadership.

Because the sample is restricted to Wycliffe Global Alliance leaders who already operate in transnational networks, the resulting paradigm is transferrable primarily to similar complex missional contexts. Congregational leadership requires cautious adaptation.

The leadership philosophies emphasised Christ-like character, spiritual devotion and community-focused leadership. Core values included integrity, humility, servant leadership and alignment between words and actions. Leaders prioritised spiritual practices, trust-building, cultural respect, lifelong learning and responsible stewardship to develop personal transformation and global missional impact (Franklin 2017:86–87).

An integrated model of global missional leadership

The collected data analysed from the leadership philosophies resulted in 10 leadership clusters. When examined alongside traits from global and missional leadership literature, these clusters clarified the contours of an emerging global missional leadership paradigm. Central to this paradigm was cultivating spiritually mature leaders capable of navigating the globalisation's complexities with wisdom and adaptability (Franklin 2016:261). The ten leadership clusters (Franklin 2017:90–91) can be grouped with the same four domains as used earlier with Niemandt's work.

Participatory

The practice of involving others in decision-making and shared responsibility.

- *Develop other leaders:* Commit to develop other leaders and nurture them personally and by encouraging professional development.
- *Nourish a flourishing community:* Value community in God's kingdom and commit to build harmonious relationships of trust.

Transformative

The approach that inspires and motivates positive change in oneself and others.

- *Christ is the ultimate leadership example:* Lead as a 'first follower' of Christ – willing to lead in and from 'unconventional and unfamiliar' ways (Sweet 2012:12).
- *Align with God's missional plan:* Understand God's missional heart as one faithfully uses his or her spiritual gifts in leadership.
- *Commit to spiritual transformation:* Live a spiritually intimate life in Christ based upon personal holiness, integrity, spiritual renewal and guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- *Communicate with integrity:* Communicate regularly and clearly one's core values through an alignment of one's words and actions.

Relational

The people-centred approach to building and maintaining trust-based relationships.

- *Relationship with Christ and reliance upon God's word:* Practice personal devotion through prayer and guidance from the Bible to discern God's will in all contexts. Before a leader can 'speak God's word [he or she] must encounter the word' (Sayers 2014:70).
- *Value people and treat them with respect:* Create a safe and trusting environment with respect and value of others who have different gifts, ethnic and church backgrounds, so that they can flourish and reach their full potential.

Adaptive

The practice of supporting others to face challenges and thrive.

- *Always learn and grow:* Model servant leadership and aim for one's full potential in God's kingdom while developing wisdom and discernment through life-long learning.
- *Face the challenges and demands of leadership:* Cultivate a global perspective while leading with humility, honesty, openness and transparency in the midst of global-regional-local complexity. Leadership is, first of all, 'a model of self-responsibility' (Schaefer & Fassel 1988:226). When leaders realise they cannot do anything in their own power, only then does a new type of power arise from their life – 'they gain spiritual authority [because] selfless leadership opens a space for God' (Sayers 2014:125).

These clusters emerged from synthesising key words, phrases and statements drawn from the personal leadership philosophies of a global leadership team. They reflect core values that transcend age, gender, ethnicity or leadership role differences, serving as guiding principles for 'developing a global mission leadership mindset' (Franklin 2017:91).

An integrated model for the global church

Franklin's qualitative study sought to merge global and missional leadership into a unified model, resulting in a set of values grouped into three overarching categories: transformational, community and developmental expectations.

Transformational expectations

'A relationship with Jesus Christ and reliance upon God's word is of primary importance'. Personal devotion through prayer and Scripture fosters an intimate life in Christ, marked by holiness, integrity, spiritual renewal and guidance from the Holy Spirit, resulting in spiritual transformation. This transformation emerges through encounters with God in both joyful and challenging seasons. 'Maturing spirituality is essential because in the long haul it means there is no quick fix'. Faithful participation in God's transformational purposes requires following the Holy Spirit and using one's innovative gift of creative leadership (Franklin 2016:249).

Community expectations

This involves a commitment to personally invest in the growth of younger and emerging leaders, supporting both their personal and professional development. Valuing people means treating them respectfully and fostering a safe and trusting environment where they can thrive and reach their full potential. Effective leadership requires understanding complex global contexts, respecting cultural diversity, adapting swiftly to change and discerning how to navigate multifaceted information and situations. 'This involves nourishing a flourishing community through building harmonious relationships of trust' resilient across geographic, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic boundaries (Franklin 2016:19).

Developmental expectations

This involves nurturing continuous growth through lifelong learning, cultivating wisdom and discernment. This commitment enables leaders and teams to form 'a responsive network of communities of leaders and teams' that seek creative solutions to complex challenges. Effective leadership requires self-awareness, selflessness and an openness to God, characterised by humility, honesty and transparency. Developing contextual intelligence is essential for navigating global, regional and local complexities. Finally, leaders must consistently and clearly communicate the organisation's core values, embodying them through both words and actions (Franklin 2016:250).

This emerging paradigm is characterised by the simultaneous continuity with tradition and openness to change:

Continuity includes faithfulness to the constancy of past tradition, and yet, at the same time, employs a bold willingness to engage in future transformations. (Franklin 2016:259)

When applied to Christian missions operating as global entities, it reflects a shift from Western colonial roots to international perspectives and, ultimately, a global alliance, navigating the challenges and opportunities brought about by the spread of technology and the decentralisation of power and authority. Missional leadership is

[A] paradigm shift from the Christendom concept of leadership through title and position, to the equipping of all God's people to live and serve in his mission. Missional leadership helps God's community take its place in God's story and participate in the triune God's mission of transformation. (Franklin 2016:248)

The shepherd-servant-steward model

While Niemandt's and Franklin's missional leadership overlap through the four domains of participatory, transformative, relational and adaptive, further exploration could be beneficial. Additional leadership models, particularly with biblical roots, can enrich this framework. However, caution is needed when drawing leadership lessons from Scripture, as it was not written as a leadership manual. Niemandt observes: 'the Bible dwells more on

leadership failures than on successes', and relying on biblical characters to develop leadership theories may provide only partial insights (Niemandt 2019b:70).

Contemporary leadership models may not align with the values of biblical leadership. For example, models may prioritise organisational success or profit, whereas biblical leadership calls leaders to pursue God's purposes, often emphasising outcomes beyond the bottom line. As Bernice Ledbetter, Robert Banks and David Greenhalgh point out, 'there is no exact equivalent to the word "leader" in the Hebrew Bible [but] the idea is certainly present' through God's active guiding, going before, and preparing the way for God's people or specific situations (Ledbetter, Banks & Greenhalgh 2016:22). In a biblical context, leadership begins with God's authority and guidance rather than human ambition.

In shaping a Christian theory of leadership, John Burns, John Shoup and Donald Simmons Jr offer these insights (Burns, Shoup & Simmons 2014:86):

- Human authority is a conduit for God's purposes rather than supplanting divine authority.
- Studying contemporary leadership theories can complement Bible exploration, contributing to a more integrated Christian vision of leadership.
- 'Biblical leadership is most strongly tied to a divine calling rather than a particular set of human gifts or abilities'.
- 'The shepherd-servant-steward' model emerges as the most positive biblical image of leadership combining a 'divinely appointed purpose and a focus on the benefit of those who are led'. Leaders operating within this framework ultimately answer to God for how they discharge their responsibilities.

As Burns, Shoup and Simmons have noted, the three-fold model of shepherd-servant-steward is a positive metaphor for leadership practice from a biblical perspective. Each is now briefly explored.

Shepherd leadership

The metaphor of the shepherd is woven into the biblical narrative, serving as a significant model for leadership based on care, responsibility and sacrifice. Scripture repeatedly contrasts faithful shepherd leadership with the failure of self-serving leaders, emphasising that shepherds are accountable to God for the well-being of those they lead. For example, in Ezekiel 34:2-5 (NIV), God condemns Israel's leaders for their selfishness and neglect:

'Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?... You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured ... [T]hey were scattered because there was no shepherd.'

Timothy Laniak explains that Ezekiel holds these leaders responsible for Judah's downfall, reminding them that they

were 'undershepherds' – servants of God, entrusted with 'God's flock not their own' (Laniak 2006:153). Their leadership failure stemmed from forgetting that their authority was derived, not autonomous.

Jesus expands this metaphor in John 10:3–4 (NLT), contrasting himself as the legitimate shepherd with the religious leaders he calls thieves and robbers. Jesus states how 'the sheep recognize his voice.... He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... and they follow him because they know his voice'. Jesus highlights relational leadership – the shepherd leads by presence, personal knowledge of the sheep, and earning trust rather than demanding obedience.

In Matthew 18:12–14 (NLT), Jesus illustrates the shepherd's relentless pursuit of the lost:

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away... [w]on't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost?

This parable underscores the shepherd's sacrificial love and commitment, reflecting God's desire that not even one is left to be lost. The shepherd's mission is restorative, seeking the vulnerable and bringing them safely home.

Laniak identifies several defining qualities of biblical shepherd leadership:

- *Comprehensive responsibility*: Shepherd leadership encompasses a wide range of roles – guide, protector, provider and caregiver. Leaders are accountable for the lives and well-being of the flock, often at personal cost. This calls for benevolent use of authority, balancing firmness with compassion: 'authority without compassion leads to harsh authoritarianism. Compassion without authority leads to social chaos' (Laniak 2006:153).
- *Service and accountability*: True shepherds serve God's people rather than exploiting them. Bad or false shepherds 'use their position to serve their own needs' forgetting the flock belongs to God. A shepherd leader must be 'both responsible for the (flock) and responsible to (the Owner)' (Laniak 2006:153).
- *Divinely appointed and Spirit-empowered*: Human leadership is an 'extension of divine rule'. Leaders 'explicitly appointed by God' and effective only when empowered by the Holy Spirit. Yet, the temptation of hubris remains a danger. Shepherd leadership requires humility before God and responsiveness to his people, resisting pride and privilege (Laniak 2006:248).
- *Protective oversight*: Shepherds are charged with protecting the vulnerable from neglect and abuse. God's people, such as sheep, easily wander, scatter and get lost. Good shepherds diligently guide, ensuring the flock reaches its intended destination – ultimately fulfilled in God's promise of eternal care (Laniak 2006:248).
- *Guidance towards God's promises*: The biblical narrative presents God as the shepherd of his people, guiding them through faithful 'undershepherds'. The vision culminates in God's eternal provision, where 'every member of the flock makes it home' (Laniak 2006:249).

Servant leadership

Patrick Nullens succinctly captures the heart of servant leadership: 'All leadership is called to serve and not to dominate' (Nullens 2014:154). This principle echoes Jesus' teaching and example. In Matthew 20:25–28 (NLT), Jesus challenges conventional notions of leadership based upon power and authority: 'You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them'. Not so with you. Instead, 'whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave' – just as the 'Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many'.

Paul echoes this attitude in Philippians 2:6–8 (NLT), urging believers to initiate Christ's humility:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges... he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Christ's self-emptying becomes the model for Christian leaders who are called to lay aside status and lead through service.

Two key Greek word groups used in the New Testament shape our understanding of servant leadership (Taylor 2000:212):

- *Diakonos* [servant, minister]: This emphasises service and ministry to others as seen in how Jesus described himself as a servant (Mk 10:45, Mt 20:28, Lk 22:27); Paul identified Jesus as a servant for God's truth (Rm 15:8–9); and applied to Christian ministry – servants of the gospel and the church (Eph 3:7, Col 1:23).
- *Doulos* [slave]: It highlights complete submission and devotion to the master, often God or Christ, as seen in Jesus calling his followers to be 'slaves of all' (Mk 10:44, Phlp 2:7); Paul calls believers 'slaves of Christ' (Rm 1:1, Gl 1:10); and believers are 'slaves to righteousness' (Rm 6:18) and called to live under Christ's authority.

Henri Nouwen emphasises that Jesus' leadership is 'a radically different kind from the leadership offered by the world' because 'it is a servant leadership – to use Robert Greenleaf's term – in which the leader is a vulnerable servant who needs the people as much as they need him or her' (Nouwen 1989:44).

Greenleaf, credited with popularising servant leadership in contemporary thought and practice, combined two seemingly contradictory roles – servant and leader – believing both could coexist within one person. Greenleaf says, 'the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to [one's] greatness'. Servant leadership begins with 'a desire to serve followed by a conscious, aspiring choice to lead'. The test of true servant leadership is whether those who serve

become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous and more likely to become servants (Greenleaf 1977:7). This approach contrasts sharply with leaders driven by power, status, or personal gain.

Sen Sendaya and Brian Cooper describe servant leadership as an 'internal orientation', where leaders willingly 'renounce the superior status attached to leadership and embrace greatness by way of servanthood' (Sendaya & Cooper 2010:2). Building on this, servant leadership can be characterised by:

- *Other-oriented focus*: Leadership is directed outward, prioritising the needs and growth of others over self-interest (Eva et al. 2019:114).
- *Empathy and personal development*: Leaders are attentive to followers' unique needs, interests, and goals, helping them reach their full potential (Northouse 2019:227).
- *Community building and shared leadership*: Servant leaders value people, develop others, foster authentic relationships and cultivate a sense of community (Laub 1999:49–51).
- *Sacrificial service and humility*: Effective leadership involves personal sacrifice, vulnerability and a willingness to lead by example rather than authority.
- *Ethical and moral leadership*: Leadership is founded upon integrity, transparency and concern for the well-being of the broader community (Eva et al. 2019:114).

Steward leadership

This form of leadership is an ancient concept with renewed relevance for contemporary leadership. Found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, stewardship is defined as managing 'resources belonging to another... to achieve the owner's objectives' (Wilson 2016:36). Stewardship involves 'the responsible overseeing and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving' (Maramara 2015:4). In this model, the steward leaders recognise that leadership is 'a trust given by God' and is accountable to 'the desires and the will of the master' (Maramara 2015:4). Leaders are not owners but trustees responsible for managing God-given resources, talents, and responsibilities according to God's design.

The Bible affirms God's ownership of all creation: 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it' (Ps 24:1, NIV); and 'To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it' (Dt 10:14, NIV). Humanity's role, as outlined in Genesis 1:26–27, is to represent God as his image-bearers, entrusted to 'rule over' creation in a way that reflects God's character – benevolent, peaceful and just. Stewardship, therefore, involves acting as God's representatives, ruling and managing his resources responsibly (Wilson 2016:52).

The Old Testament presents humanity as trustees, permitted to exercise 'temporary ownership' under the condition that

God's ultimate ownership is always acknowledged (Wilson 2016:52). This relational dynamic is central to steward leadership. God provides both resources and the ability to use them wisely. The steward's proper response includes thankfulness, obedience, humility and a constant awareness of God's sovereignty.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *oikonomos* [steward, manager] captures the steward's role in various contexts:

- *Household or organisational management*: 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge ...?' (Lk 12:42, NIV); and 'Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful' (1 Cor 4:2, NIV).
- *Public administration*: 'Erastus, our town clerk ...' (Rm 16:23, PHILLIPS).
- *Spiritual stewardship*: 'This is how you should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries God' (1 Cor 4:1, ESV); and 'Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace' (1 Pt 4:10, NIV).

These passages show how faithfulness is the primary requirement of a steward. Steward leaders are accountable to God, entrusted with resources to serve others and accomplish the owner's purpose.

R. Scott Rodin states that steward leadership begins with inner transformation: 'it is based on the transformation that takes place in the heart of the leader as a faithful and godly steward' working from this inner change to outward impact (Rodin 2010:82). Rodin's perspective highlights two key aspects:

- *Being over doing*: Steward leadership focuses on the leader's character and relationship with God before tasks and performance.
- *Ongoing transformation*: The steward's journey is continuous, requiring humility, repentance, and alignment with God's purposes.

This 'inward-outward' dynamic sets the 'steward leader apart from the array of secular leadership theories' by acknowledging brokenness (original sin) and the need for divine grace in leadership (Rodin 2010:82).

Kent Wilson observes that most people in organisations act as 'stewards who are managing and using resources they do not personally own' (Wilson 2016:203). Peter Block describes stewardship as promoting collaboration over competition and service over self-interest, urging leaders to focus on 'meaning and impact' rather than personal advancement (Block 2013:8).

Integration of three models

Building on Niemandt's church-culture-Scripture dialogue, Franklin's leadership clusters and a synthesis of the three-fold

TABLE 1: Integration of Niemandt, Franklin and shepherd-servant-steward.

Integrative domain	Niemandt's trialogue	Franklin's leadership clusters	Shepherd-servant-steward synthesis
Participatory	Leadership joins with the <i>missio Dei</i> ; communal discernment, service and shared action	Multiply by developing leaders and nourishing trusting communities	Faithfully committed to God's mission and personal integrity; empowers others for good of the whole body
Transformative	Spirit-empowered change; kenotic presence and prophetic challenge for justice	Christ-shaped change aligned with God's missional plan; modelling holiness; communicating values	Accountable to God and the community; ensures transformation is sustained
Relational	Multi-centred, trust-based networks; listening, collaboration, imagination	Relationship with Christ and Scripture; value people, create safe spaces	Knows and cares for followers, creates belonging; offers guidance and connection
Adaptive	Enable, not control innovation; anticipate God's future, disrupt status quo with hope	Lifelong learning, humility, global-local discernment; face complexity openly	Fosters continual growth of people; exercises God's derived authority that does not dominate

shepherd-servant-steward models are integrated into four domains: participatory, transformative, relational and adaptive leadership.

Participatory

The leader is faithfully committed to God's mission and consistent leadership integrity. The leader empowers others through enabling them to lead and grow in their roles.

Transformative

It is sacrificial because it reflects self-giving service. The leader is also accountable to God and those they serve. The leader understands how trust is foundational for cultivating healthy, nourishing communities. Practising humility is core to how to lead effectively.

Relational

Selflessness is displayed through prioritising others' needs. The leader knows the importance of connection, guidance, and community-building. Compassion is shown through the care of people without compromising responsibility.

Adaptive

The leader is growth-oriented through fostering personal development and communal flourishing. The leader's authority points to God-derived leadership that serves rather than dominates.

Using the four domains that were applied to Niemandt's trialogue, Franklin's leadership clusters and shepherd-servant-steward synthesis, it is possible to see how these compare (shown in Table 1).

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate Niemandt's model of missional leadership emerging from the trialogue:

'the discerning interaction between church, culture, and biblical narrative' (Niemandt 2013b). The trialogue serves as a collaborative space where the global church seeks to understand and actively participate in the work of the Holy Spirit. Niemandt's definition of missional leadership, while concise, is underpinned by a rich and multidisciplinary body of work.

Building on Niemandt's foundation, the analysis examined Franklin's development of leadership clusters among global missional leaders. Franklin's work, directly influenced by Niemandt, provides a practical outworking of missional leadership within diverse, global contexts.

The study explored the three-fold biblical framework of shepherd-servant-steward leadership to enhance the understanding of missional leadership further. Integrating this framework with Niemandt's and Franklin's models strengthens a biblical direction applicable to missional leadership.

Leaders seeking to embody (global) missional leadership must cultivate personal spiritual disciplines, embrace humility and service, and foster collaborative leadership environments that empower others. Navigating global complexities requires leaders to be adaptable, contextually aware and guided by biblical values.

As the global church continues to engage with diverse cultures and shifting contexts, (global) missional leadership must remain dynamic, biblically influenced and responsive to the Holy Spirit. The foundational work of Niemandt complemented by Franklin, contributes to the conversation for (global) missional leaders to serve faithfully, lead humbly and steward God's mission with integrity for the flourishing of God's kingdom.

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