



# Character formation and leadership development: A symbiotic bond for the practice of theological education

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This study explores the relationship between character formation and leadership development. It focuses on three research questions: Firstly, why is character formation an important dimension in leader development? Secondly, how is leader development related to character formation in the practice of theological education? Thirdly, what model of theological education develops leaders of character who can function effectively in the public square? The study uses a literature review to explain key concepts, 'character formation', 'leadership development' and 'theological education' and explores their relationship in the practice of theological education. It was established that character formation and leader development have a solid interlocking relationship. Without sound character formation and leader development models, it is not possible to produce effective leaders for the church. We need transformational and visionary leaders to engage with the task of producing effective leaders of character who can engage church and community in the public square. The study proposes the Character Formation cum Leadership Development Model (CFLD) model of theological education, which borrows essential elements from the Athens Model and the Leader Development Model. The CFLD model is the most appropriate option for theological educators to adopt in to engage with the task of producing and developing leader and character-sensitive Christian workers. The study concludes that character formation and leadership development have a symbiotic bond in the practice of theological education.

**Contribution:** The study contributes to our understanding of theological education as ministerial character formation and how leadership development is interwoven with and interdependent on character. The symbiotic relationship between character formation and leadership development has significant implications for the practice of theological education and how Christian leaders are prepared for the work of ministry in the church.

**Keywords:** character; character formation; leadership; leadership development; leader development; theological education; character and leadership development.

## Introduction

This article examines the relationship between leader development and character formation with special reference to the church praxis today. The Global Leadership Network (2017) once highlighted:

Without strong leadership, the spiritual vitality of a church begins to crumble. When this happens, not only do those who are a part of the church begin to lose steam, the community that surrounds it does not see the church as a beacon in the community, or worse, they reject the church all together. (p. 1)

This is why the church should invest in leadership development in all aspects of human life, which is so critical (Global Leadership Network 2017; Oshun 2010:7–8). The theological education institutions have an imperative mandate – to form leaders who model character and integrity in order to serve the African community faithfully (Ayandokun 2021:60).

The article seeks to answer the following research questions in response to the general question: Firstly, why is character formation an important dimension in leader development? Secondly, how is leader development related to character formation in the practice of theological education? Thirdly, what model of theological education develops leaders of character who can function effectively in the public square? Three key concepts are explored: leader development, character formation and theological education.

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## Understanding the concept 'theological education'

Hartshorne (1946:235), once said that answering the question, 'What is theological education?' is not a simple answer because the concept 'theological education' involves varieties of concepts of theory and practice that one hardly knows what he is talking about. The scholar says, 'It is what it has become in institutions organised by the churches and church people to prepare men, and more recently women for church leadership' (Hartshorne 1946:235). He observed that theological education means differently to different church organisations and therefore, '... the pattern [*and meaning*] of theological education had become what it is today as an unconscious process' (Hartshorne 1946:236).

He noted that other organisation defined theological education as constituted of unrelated minister's tasks, pointing at two missing elements: the coherence and relationships of the subject matter of study and the meaning of the subject matter to the ministers' task (Hartshorne 1946:241). Edgar (2010) identified four core components that are essential in defining the concept theological education: the content (referring to the subject matter that constitutes it); method (implying processes involved in the practice of theological education); ethos (referring to the spiritual components developed) and finally context (who is giving the definition), each carrying with it different emphases.

Otokola (2017:94), Cheeseman (2011) and Marbaniang (2016) conceive theological education as the training of men and women to know and serve God and become leaders of the Christian community. Ott (2016:7, 196) maintains, 'It is specialised training for pastors and leaders ... to serve as leaders of the church ... with its primary and secondary venues as the church and community', respectively. According to Ott (2016:196), theological education situated in the former implies home-grown leadership while in the latter, it refers to in-ministry training. The implication is that the church as the primary venue for theological education underscores the pedagogical significance of relationships between church and community.

Ott (2016:196ff.) noted that in coming up with a more inclusive and comprehensive definition, two perspectives should be considered: the theological perspective and the theoretical perspective. In the former, theological education should embrace five elements: (1) Theological education as the study of God, both existentially and academically; (2) theological education as the study of the word of the Bible, as brought down to us by tradition; (3) theological education as a *missio Dei* project, serving the church in its mission by equipping people for the various ministries of and for the church; (4) theological education as, not only about equipping people with abilities and accomplishments but training them on their powerlessness and dependency on the Spirit of God. In the latter category, theological education is: (1) focussed training that equips for a particular vocation; (2) structured

formal programme that leads to some form of certification or degree; (3) curricula and courses of study that are meant to shape the individual and prepare him or her for service in the church.

Igbari (2001:4) defined theological education as, 'The systematic study of the Word of God and of how it relates to man and his environment ...' Igbari (2001:14–15) sees theological education as an effort at developing three fundamental qualities: knowledge, spiritual growth and leadership for the church. The last quality of leadership development is what Easley (2014:7) argues constitutes theological education. Easley (2014:9) further contended that the ultimate aim of theological education is the development of transformative leaders who become the salt and light of the world. In qualifying his definition, Easley (2014:9) raised three critical purposes. Firstly, he argues that theological education is the *kerugma* of Christian leadership development. Secondly, leadership development seeks to enable men and women to become transformative practitioners of the word of God where their fruitfulness comes as the leaders expand their ability for theological reflection, practice their engagement within the context of God's calling and give attention to personal formation by the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, theological education should help engender a growing practice of wisdom, which is the ability and practice of using experience, knowledge and good judgement to find and implement solutions for present and future issues. The study values Easley's conceptualisation because of its clarity on goals, identification of church as location for theological education and emphasis of the place of leadership in theological education.

## Understanding the concept 'leader development'

Easley (2014:19) defines leader development by explaining what it seeks to achieve. Leader development must develop three fundamental qualities: knowledge; spiritual growth and leadership within the church. The scholar sees leader development as the process of shaping leaders to become transformative practitioners of the Word of God in a broken and hurting world (Easley 2014:9). It is the ability to become fruitful in the community through the practice of using experience, knowledge and good judgement to find and implement solutions for present and future issues (Easley 2014:9). Griffith (1988:51–52) adopts the same approach by saying, 'Leader development must focus on three main areas: character, skills, and knowledge'. Among these three, character is most important in order to tend, teach and counsel the flock effectively (Griffith 1988:52). 'Character matters, which is why leaders of leadership training programmes primarily "teach by who they are"' (Hardy 2016:20). However, Igbari (2001) maintained that as theological education is about developing the leader, it follows that theological education is in fact leader development.

Krispin (2020:19) urges readers to understand the difference between leadership development and leader development. The former refers to the growth of a collective's capacity to produce direction, alignment and commitment, whereas the latter means the expansion of the capacity of individuals to be effective in leadership roles and processes (Day & Dragoni 2015:134). McCauley, Velsor and Ruderman (2010) carefully noted that leadership development includes both the development of the individual person for leadership roles, fostering his or her ability to encourage direction, alignment and commitment in a group. Therefore, individual leader development is part of, and contributes to, but is not the sole focus of, leadership development.

## Understanding the concept 'character formation'

Habl (2011:141) noted that in the 21st century, questions about character formation are moving from the margins to the centre of social and educational attention. As Lipovetsky (1999:11) has written, 'The 21st Century will either be ethical or it will not be at all'. Habl (2011:141) complained, '... the physical survival of the population' is at stake, surmising that if things continue as they are, the planet will become uninhabitable. At the centre of the apparent emphasis is the fact that there exists a moral deficit in society and therefore arising is the need to reclaim a forgotten mandate – character formation.

Dykstra (1991) equates character formation to Christian formation, which is the activity of God in sanctification, where sanctification is conceived of as the life-long process of formation and transformation of Christian character. Collicutt (2015:3) uses pictorial images and imagery to describe Christian formation, which he says can be seen to mirror a picture of a potter moulding his clay. Character formation is therefore a legitimate collaborative stance among various community agencies such as the church, the family, peers and educational institutions – all are key to the formational process.

Habl (2011:141) observed that the need for character formation has raised critical questions on different fronts as follows. On the one hand, there are questions about methodology – such as, how to educate character, by what method, in what form and using what means. On the other hand, there are questions of content – what to teach, what kind of knowledge and which skills to be developed. There are also teleological questions: what is the goal of moral education and what should the properly formed character look like? Equally important are questions of philosophy and anthropology, which require a cultural–historical interpretation: where did the moral deficit come from that drive people to the brink of self-destruction? What are its roots, what is it based on? Fundamentally important is the question: how is it that human character needs formation in the first place? Why does it suffer de-formatational tendencies?

Hauerwas (1975:231) maintains that character formation takes place because we are fundamentally social beings,

implying that the character thus formed is relative to the kind of community from which we inherited our primary symbols and practices. Pradhan (2009:4) points out that it grows through activity, effort and taking responsibility through the making of hard choices in life.

The growth process is greatly affected by personal and social influences. The growth of character brings with it an increasing integration that manifests itself among other ways, in resistance to the various influences. However, it has been found out that when character and intellect grow side by side and reciprocally influence one another, the two growth processes and the resulting organisations are largely independent of one another (Pradhan 2009:4). Character formation is a process (Oxenham 2019; Pradhan 2009:4; Rogers 1991:430) and a journey (Bland 2015:41), implying that it has a starting point and focuses on a goal.

## The relationship between character formation and leadership development

Spears (2010:25–26) noted that the nature of character and its relationship to leaders has taken on increased significance in recent years with the emphasis being to understand the character traits of leaders and relating them to effectiveness. Hardy (2016:19) underscores the importance of character in leadership development when he says, 'Who we are (which is our character) communicates how we lead'. Hardy (2016:19) further stresses that effective leadership stems out of qualities of life – the character. Mazutis and Marchand (2013:1) contend that even in the secular context, it is not just the 'what' or the 'how' of a strategy that determines success, but it is the character 'who' is in charge that determines performance. Leadership is influence (Maxwell 1998:17). Therefore, the leaders' behaviour or character affects and influences the organisations' success or failure (Ayandokun 2021:62).

It is interesting to note that leadership development has begun to focus beyond individual's competency to examine leader character (Cullen-Lester et al. 2017; Day et al. 2014; Sturm, Vera & Crossan 2017). 'Competency is about what a leader can do, whereas character, arises from the behaviours that are anchored in virtues, is about what a leader is' (Crossan, Ellis & Crossan 2021:288). Leader character focuses on the disposition to lead as opposed to the position to lead. In developing a leader character, it is critical to recognise the recursive relationship between character and the context in which it is exhibited.

Character formation is a continuous process of development through which leaders increasingly integrate their values and beliefs. The leaders' system of values and beliefs about virtues and values influence their perceptions and judgements on moral and ethical issues that they encounter in the process of leading (Sweeney & Fry 2012:90).

The million-dollar question is: ‘... if we can develop leaders with character and integrity ... how do we do it?’ (Mazutis & Marchand 2013:1). Character mediates the relationship between the context and 10 essential dimensions: accountability, transcendence, justice, courage, drive, collaboration, temperance, humanity, integrity and humility, and through this mediation process, leader character is developed (Crossan et al. 2021:289). Hardy (2016:22) provides us with a partial answer when he points out that leadership competencies are identified by observing the characters of people. The competencies include self-awareness of our own thinking, values, feelings and behaviour and how they interact with peers, colleagues and subordinates. Leading with character means that who you transcend how you lead across the levels of self, others, the organisations and society (Mazutis & Marchand 2013:2).

The effectiveness of a leader is rated against how values and action are invested and integrated in leadership practice. This means that it is critically important to look at how leaders develop and hold the values that are foundational to their actions. In reality, the character determines the selection of some values over others and therefore defines the value system. At the core, character is critically important for effective leadership. The implication for theological educators is that in order to produce a model that is character sensitive, there is a need to have some idea about the kind of leader that the character-sensitive model is seeking to produce.

Malphurs and Mancini (2004) identified four competencies to be developed in a Christian leader: being, knowing, doing and feeling. Being addresses the development of Christ-like character based on biblical requirements for leaders and the teachability of the spirit. ‘Knowing’ refers to the knowledge that a leader has of God and his Word. The ‘doing’ focuses on developing of skills such as strategic planning, preaching and teaching while the ‘feeling’ dimension includes awareness of one’s and others’ emotions and the ability to manage them.

Based on Malphurs and Mancini (2004) and Mazutis and Marchand’s (2013) conceptualisations, it is apparently clear that character and leadership competencies are intricately interwoven and related. A question of interest can be posed here: What is developed first, character or leadership? Krispin (2020:25–26) noted with concern the failure by both the secular and Christian organisation to factor in foundational frameworks of character formation and faith or spiritual formation in leadership development. In the scholar’s assessment, character formation is foundational to and precedes leader development. The same view was shared by Hardy (2016:20) when he pointed out that character matters, which is why leaders of leadership training programmes primarily teach by what they are, implying that character comes first before leadership development.

There must be congruence in one’s values and one’s life (Mencarini 2017:42–43) implying that leadership should be rooted in a vibrant, active faith and Christlike character (Krispin

2020:26). Mencarini (2017) in Skendall et al. (2017:42–43) referred to these values as 7Cs as follows: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility and citizenship. Interestingly, these are character traits, yet also, they can be considered as leader qualities showing the interwoven nature of character formation and leader development. Spencer and Lucas (2019:10) confirm that character shapes the leadership values and virtues. In fact, everything that a leader says, does and every feeling that a leader expresses is observed and conceptualised by those he leads as his or her character (De Braine 2007:8), expressing the interrelatedness of character and leader.

De Braine (2007:8) raises two very important considerations that have great implications for those that lead others. Firstly, character development rests upon the shoulders of the individual leader in a particular context, implying the mandatory imperative for leaders in the character development of those that they lead. Secondly, that character development occurs through the daily work experience of leaders and employees interacting with one another, interacting with clients, performing one’s daily work tasks and dealing with complex challenges, emphasising the importance of a stimulating context of sound relationships between the leader and the led. De Braine’s (2007) conceptualisation mirrors that of Widyatmoko, Pabbajah and Widyanti (2020:1) that leader character is the major factor for institutional effectiveness as it has the potential to influence the character of those that are led, implying that character formation is indispensable for leadership development.

These are critical factors in the relationship between character formation and leader development. Kouzes and Posner (2005:2) have this to say, ‘The more we study leadership, the more we’re persuaded that leadership development is not simply about “how to’s.” It’s also about character development’. Leadership development is a participation in an unfolding future that has more to do with our ‘being – our total orientation of character and consciousness – than with what we do’ (Jaworski & Senge 1996:7). Therefore, the character of the leaders provides the platform upon which they can be authentic and serve their followers (De Braine 2007:8). The essence of a great leader lies in the development of character elements. However, it is important to note that different elements of character and the degree to which they are reflected vary in different leadership work contexts. These assertions by De Braine (2007) point us to understand the interconnectedness of leader development and character formation.

## The role of the laity in character formation and leader development programmes

Obiorah (2020:3) noted that the role of the laity in character formation programmes for the Christian leaders should be related to the mission of the church. The scholar identified three critical roles of the church: (1) the proclamation of the gospel among socio-cultural communities where Christ is

least known, (2) sound pastoral care for both pastoral leaders and laity and (3) the re-energization and re-evangelisation of those within the ecclesial community who are experiencing tepidity. It is within the scale of these roles that the participation of the laity becomes indispensable. The implication is that effective execution of these roles requires Christian leaders who are sufficiently character formed and leader developed.

However, Obiorah (2020:2–3) warns readers against three impediments that militate against the participation of the laity in the mission of the church. Firstly, there is the challenge of striking a compromise between demands of family life against the demands of a Christian life. Secondly, there is the materialistic nature of the world, where the desire for material things has nothing to do with the propagation of the Christian faith. Thirdly, there is syncretism, arising from the nature of African culture, which is incongruous with Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The researcher argues that these obstructions hinder the full participation of the laity even in matters involving character formation and leader development. Notwithstanding the reality that pastoral leaders may be indifferent to the positions and role of laity in leadership in the church, Obiorah (2020:7) underscored the value of character formation programmes for both the pastoral leaders and the laity. The scholar maintains that such programmes enhance the participation of both laity and pastors in the mission of the church. For Duncan (2006:14), both laity and pastoral leaders are developed through cohesive practice where emphasis is on blending character formation and leader development. In this respect, Obiorah (2020:14) argues that church programmes should involve both laity and pastoral leaders in decision-making as well as in ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. An exploration of the coercive strategy by Duncan (2006:14–16) within mission schools explains why character formation was a central theme in developing leaders with abilities and equipping them with skills that helped them to function responsibly in modern societies. Character formation was a central theme that was regarded as a ‘... a foil to barbarism’ (Duncan 2006:14).

And what has God to do with the relationship between leader development and character formation in the practice of theological education? We adopt the stance taken by Knoetze (2022:6) that ‘the answer is everything!’, as is depicted in Psalm 24:1, which says, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for He founded it on the seas and established it on the waters’. Having discussed the relationship between character formation and leader development, and the role of laity in character formation and leader development, the discussion proceeds to clarify why character formation is an important factor in leader development. In seeking to provide answers to this question, we are in fact describing the leadership types and the characters that define them. It is the distinct characters within each leadership type that justify their indispensability and essence in leadership development. This discussion will only discuss two leadership types that are critical in and

congenial to theological education, the transformational leadership and the visionary leadership.

## Leadership types in theological education

There are many leadership types or styles in operation within the secular and non-secular institutions. Each leadership style has its own merits and demerits. However, this article shall only discuss two key and important leadership types that are ideal in the practice of theological education.

### Transformational leadership

It has already been pointed out that effective leadership is the result of particular character traits (Spencer & Lucas 2019:10). Nevertheless, it is apparent that no single trait can predict and define effective leadership but that it is a conglomeration of many traits. In the 21st century, a transformational leadership paradigm was developed, which sought to elevate the role of values and beliefs in a leader–follower contextual relationship or a leader–servant relationship (Spears 2010:226).

Pettit (2008:155) and Spears (2010:29) asserted that within certain organisations – churches included – leaders are most effective only when they are motivated by a concern for others, when their actions are guided primarily by the criteria of ‘the benefit to others even if it results in some cost to self’. In a theological education context, we are asking how theological educators can produce Christian leaders who are motivated to serve others even if such service results in cost to self. Such Christian leaders should be guided by the altruistic motive, which is consistent with moral leadership behaviour. Transformative leaders are ‘others-focused’ and therefore have a moral responsibility and obligation to serve others.

In contrast, immoral leadership is egotistical and benefits the leader personally rather than benefitting others or the organisation. The problem in many church leaders today, especially prosperity churches, is that they are motivated by egoistic concerns and values. Therefore, they are ‘self-focused leaders’ instead of being ‘other-focused leaders’. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that some transformational leaders who are not ‘self-focused leaders’ may genuinely believe that their motives are altruistic.

Where this is the case, we have pseudo-transformational leaders who look like they are acting transformational. The view that transformational leaders are not ‘self-focused’ but ‘others focused’ tends to make us believe that they can rightly address leadership characters within churches. What is apparent with transformational leadership is that it does not adequately address the problem of distinguishing moral leadership from immoral leaders based on their actions. Another problem is that transformational leadership does not explicitly include character as a foundational component of the process. The implication for theological education is

that if moral leaders are to be produced in theological education institutions, the programmes must clearly be character-focused as it has already been pointed out that character and leadership are inextricably related.

## Visionary leadership

Visionary leadership acknowledges that the leadership is more than specific behaviours enacted by the leader. Visionary leadership declares that the leader's character is what promotes the transformational behaviour of the leader. What makes visionary leadership distinct among other leadership models is that it shows how the personal characters of the leader guide transformational leader's action (Pettit 2008:156). The challenge for theological educators is to look for a theological education model that takes account of both leaders' behaviours and the leader's personal characteristics and one that considers the characteristics of the situation, which is the context.

The ideal theological education model should be holistic and contextual in its scope. A theological education model should consider the context of the leader and that of the followers and the other cultural dimensions – political and socio-economic contexts. The learning programme must be aligned and relevant to the lived needs and worldview of the context (Naidoo 2021:53). Such a programme will produce ministry leaders who are willing '... to be with people and listen to their challenges and journey with them without offering simplistic solutions' (Magezi 2021:152).

Personal characteristics included in visionary leadership include such qualities as 'confident leadership' and 'follower-centred leadership'. According to Pettit (2008:156–157), 'confident leadership' is the same as 'self-efficacy' and 'self-control', which are tied to emotional intelligence. Leader confidence involves personal control and believes in overall unifying purpose and meaning in life's events, which is a concept that is equivalent to the self-regulatory construct 'sense of coherence' (Pettit 2008:156). Magezi (2021:152) adds another quality – vulnerability – which entails exposing oneself to being stupid and failing, and yet in that process the lessons you learn are priceless power (Magezi 2021:153). The urge to '... intentionally prepare leaders to be wounded healers who are vulnerable like the other people' (Magezi 2021:153), should be a priority for theological educators.

These characteristics of visionary leadership correspond to the character trait of self-directedness. Follower-centred leadership involves the leader's motivation for effective leading. The point to take note of is whether leadership actions are personally or otherwise motivated. Follower-centred leadership corresponds to the character trait of cooperativeness. The third characteristic of visionary leadership is vision. Vision is the ability of the leader and not necessarily the character trait of the leader.

The foundational components of vision are linked to leader self-regulation for they require the ability to see the long-

term implications and consequences of actions before any action is taken, and this 'big picture' perspective corresponds to the character trait of self-transcendence. The distinct quality of visionary leadership is that it considers the primacy of character in the motivation behind effective leadership behaviours. Within the context of theological education, a model that places importance of visionary leadership will develop effective leaders of character.

Visionary leadership attempts to consider how the inner life of the leader – the leader's being – causes the leader to act in a manner that transforms those around the leader – the people and the institutions they lead and those living within the wider cultural context (Pettit 2008:157). In short, our character affects the way we lead. A visionary leadership type that calls the inner life of the leader to account for his actions and behaviours has a regulatory effect. The question to ask ourselves is, 'How can we lead the church of God if our character is questionable and compromised?' To this end, the challenge is for theological leaders to design models of theological education that place emphasis on producing leaders of character – leaders that are both visionary and transformative in their approaches.

The preceding discussion gives primacy to the visionary leader as the ideal leader that can challenge the character problems of church leaders. However, transformative leaders are not outrightly discounted, as by virtue of their characteristics they are not self-oriented but others-focused leaders. Therefore, the type of leader that a suitable theological model seeks to produce, in the context of this discussion is a visionary-cum-transformative leader. What can be discerned from the discussion of these two types of leadership are four abilities: ability to provide vision and plan; equipping and encouraging teams; teaching and ability to engage community in the public square (Hardy 2016:20–21). The next question to address is: What factors in the practice of theological education should be in place to produce the mature visionary-cum-transformative leader? Two factors – spiritual formation and community engagement – are identified.

## Key 'factors of production': The transformative-cum-visionary leader

### Spiritual formation

As a leader, spiritual formation is critical for the development of character in a leader. Rima (2000:129) says, '... leadership is, at its most essential level, a spiritual activity... in the final analysis of every leadership failure is at its root, a spiritual issue – a spiritual disease'.

Any such 'spiritual disease' must be treated appropriately by recognising that it is a character deficiency (Pettit 2008:158). As discussed above, the key to understand a leader's character lies with the character trait of self-directedness where low self-directedness is the root cause of all personality disorders (Rima 2000:129). For example, the inability of

leaders to regulate their impulses and desires eclipses any attention to other people.

Therefore, self-directedness is the pathway through which all other character traits are accessed and utilised (Pettit 2008:158). The practical implication for theological education is that the key to unlock the character mystery is through personal discipline. In a theological college context, the praxis becomes the means of involving the students in contexts where they work and exercise cooperation with other people. Extra-curricular activities and allegiance to codes of conduct through the department of student affairs are such environments where the character mystery is unlocked.

The imperative is to equip the curriculum with disciplines that adequately address issues to do with traits such as self-directedness. The imperative is that all who aspire to lead church groups or congregations must commit to developing their own character. The biggest challenge for character formation is probably the fact that most people are not exposed to contexts of life-changing influences that stimulate such transformations. In the context of a theological college setting, we are considering growth environments such as chaplaincy services and devotions, student-peer group cells, staff mentoring teams and opportunities for sporting activities.

### Community-focused engagement

Character development requires the process of socialisation through community engagement (Hogan & Sinclair 1997:260). The same is the case for leader development. Kinsler (1978:13) underscored the importance of the community or the social context in leadership development when he said, 'Leaders are not formed by educational institutions ... leadership development takes place in society'. He further noted the apathy in Africa – that most theological colleges are *training in ministry* instead of *preparing for ministry*. Within the theological college setting, the structures for socialisation must be distinct enough to encourage character development. Participation in one or more community-focused groups promotes character development. In the college setup, students may be encouraged to be part of a community development grouping during their ministerial training at the college.

While these two, spiritual formation and community engagement, do not represent the entire repertoire of factors that facilitate the development of visionary leaders, they stand out in contrast to the rest because of their primary importance. Other factors such as peer groupings, mentoring groups and affiliation to civic groupings, all contribute to developing visionary-cum-transformative leaders. For effective leader development that has its grounding in spiritual formation and community enablement, we need a theological education model that is also entrenched in a strong character formation foundation. We ask the question: What model of theological education develops leaders of character who can function effectively in the public square?

## The character formation cum leadership development model of theological education

The article proposes a blend of two theological models: the Athens (Classical) or more popularly referred as the Character Formation model proposed by Kelsey (1993), and the Leadership Development model suggested by Easley (2014). For purposes of this discussion and thereon the blended model shall be referred to as the Character Formation cum Leadership Development (CF-LD) model of theological education. It is not an entirely new model as it borrows essential concepts and themes from the two different perspectives and therefore, its basic tenets are defined and informed by the two models – the Character Formation and the Leader Development Models. This implies that each of the two models will lend its specific quality and identity to make the CF-LD model holistic in outlook and practice. In order to determine the fitness of this model, it is important to explore its nature and characteristics.

### Goal, content and context

In general, models of theological education are by their very nature goal-directed, context and content-defined. The CF-LD model of theological education has two major goals as follows:

1. Firstly, it seeks to cultivate a person's spirit, character and mind so that their faith is deepened so that they are better prepared for the practice of ministry and can respond effectively to public issues affecting the public.
2. Secondly, it seeks to develop leaders with transformational and visionary skills and competencies that will help them to lead churches effectively and challenge socio-economic problems affecting the church and community.

Any other subsidiary goals should stem out of the interaction between the two major goals highlighted.

### Characteristics of the Character Formation cum Leadership Development Model

#### Key concepts

As indicated above, the CF-LD model is not a new model but a blend of two models with 'adds on' from both the Athens and the Leader Development models. The 'adds on' are the key ingredients, which complement and give the model its robust approach to theological education practice.

The CF-LD model is grounded in, and informed by, the following key concepts: Paideia, theologia, habitus, community engagement and personal formation. These will be briefly explained.

- Paideia: As defined earlier in the discussion, paideia simply means personal theological formation by which a certain disposition (or habitus) is required (Wahl 2013:273). Kelsey (1992:64) defines it as 'schooling', 'culturing' or 'character formation'. Although the use of

the word *paideia* went through transformations over time, it retained its essential meaning – the culturing of the soul to have virtue ethics, or expressed differently, it is cultivating a person's spirit, character and mind so that their faith is deepened and that they are better prepared for the practice of ministry. This is generally referred to as character formation. The CF-LD is thus rooted in character formation.

- **Theologia:** It is the theological understanding behind the subject matter and education goals in the ecclesial community (Farley 1983:176) or further elaborated, it is a reflective understanding shared by members of a Christian community regarding who they are, and what they are to do given their concrete world historical situation.
- **Habitus:** It is the habit of making judgements about life, death and community that are grounded in a fundamental understanding of what it is to be a Christian here and now – which is sapiential wisdom (Easley 2014:8).
- **Community engagement:** This is the process of engaging the community in problem solving and goal attainment.
- **Personal formation:** the ability to think logically about circumstances we face at a personal level through culturing the soul, sanctification by the Holy Spirit and a commitment to live a Christ-like life (Easley 2014:14).

The CF-LD model of theological education is rooted in *paideia*, *theologia*, *habitus*, theological reflection, community engagement and personal formation. These characteristics are essential for leadership development.

### Characteristics

Farley (1983:84–88) and Dykstra (1991:53) critiqued theological education models that depict the clerical paradigm. The CF-LD of theological education is a clear departure from the practice of theological education as a clerical paradigm. Its dialectical nature, praxis-based reflection, discipleship focussed strategies, communal engagement, its unifying factor in *theologia*, its integrative nature, its relational nature in instructional pedagogy and its public theology approach. These will be briefly discussed in turn. Its dialectical activity encourages the formation of new knowledge as the curriculum is continually questioned and revised, giving rise to change.

#### 1. The dialectical quality

One of the qualities of the CF-LD model is that it possesses a dialectical character, which is crucial for the formation of new knowledge, and helps to transform the scholarship and the curriculum. Its dialectical activity encourages the formation of new knowledge as the leaders use their theological lenses to continually question and revise the curriculum thereby giving rise to change. Sometimes change is difficult to accept and affect in a society with differing diverse perspectives.

We need visionary and transformative leadership that can engage in dialectical reflection to motivate and stir people towards the desired change. The transformative and visionary leaders who are 'other-focused' are able to assess the impact of the desired change without any prejudices as they are leaders who possess moral character attributes.

#### 2. Praxis-based reflection

It is the ability to see the present realities in the light of biblical truths and theological constructs (Easley 2014:11). Praxis-based reflective methods of the CF-LD model make it possible to use the church in the community as the seedbed of ministry (Wahl 2013:274). As the model itself encourages community-based integration, collaboration and engagement, it is easy to match the needs of the community with the changes in the curriculum of the theological college.

#### 3. Discipleship strategies

The CF-LD model has a strong emphasis on the place of discipleship in character formation and leader development. According to the discipleship model, character formation develops first out of personal commitment to the faith and second out of a discipline, where the training of the mind, prayer and brokenness are characteristics to be nurtured. The model embraces tolerance dialogue and collaboration and values differing perspectives, otherwise sometimes referred to as diversity.

#### 4. The communal engagement as praxis

The communal engagement character of the CF-LD model makes it possible to assess the value and impact of its programmes. The emphasis of the model on communal engagement makes it possible to engage the people at grassroot level to determine their needs, and a way of assessing whether any of its programmes has an effect and impact on their lives or not. The model does this through a contextual theological lens where it uses the structures in the community to effect attitude change and innovations.

#### 5. The unifying factor of *theologia*

The problem of fragmentation of theological education caused by the mere application of theory and the abstraction of theory from its context (Banks 1999:20; Kelsey 1993:102) may also be reversed by applying the proposed disposition and reflective conversations of the CF-LD model. Its emphasis on community engagement, leadership development and discipleship makes it possible to test case theory by offering to practise it on the ground. By its very nature, the CF-LD has the capacity to challenge fragmentation of *theologia*, a problem that has characterised earlier theological education models.

#### 6. The integrative and relational nature of CF-LD

The CF-LD model is integrative in scope and holistic in approach. The key indicator of the integrative approach is the intentional integration of knowing with being and doing, of theory with practice and of theology with life and ministry (Naidoo 2021:48). As the CF-LD model is tolerant to diversity and difference, it encourages character formation and leader development that is informed by a rich African cultural milieu where formation is strongly aligned to the African concept of 'personhood' (Naidoo 2021:61).



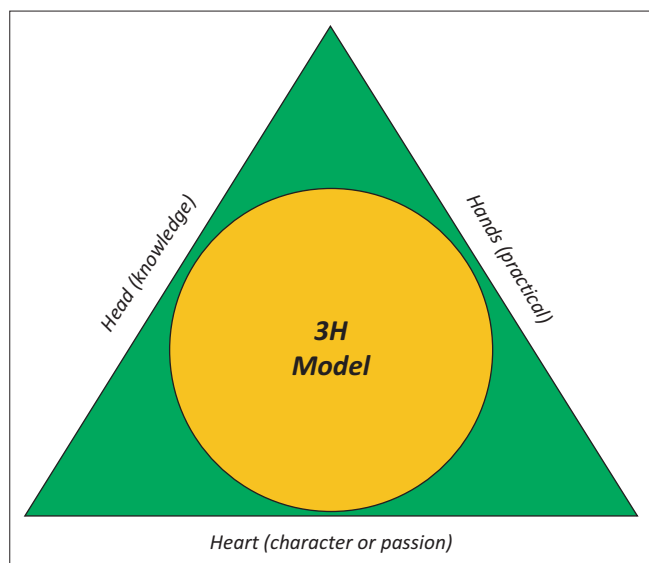


FIGURE 1. The 3H model of character formation.

Its insistency on character formation and leadership development and on collaboration and community engagement makes it possible for students to form attitudes and characters that serve as lifetime tools for ongoing conversion and transformation. According to Miller (2019:7) as cited by Naidoo (2021:59), integrative educational programmes ‘... must focus on the training of the person, mind, heart and body for greater social impact, and for individual and collective well-being’ (Miller 2019:7).

The CF-LD model’s relational nature enhances learning through the three dimensions: the heart (character), the hands (practical) and the head (knowledge). As teachers and students relate favourable to one another, teaching the ‘heart’, the ‘hands’ and the ‘head’ becomes possible and effective. The successful application of this instructional pedagogy ensures the development of a rounded ministerial candidate who can effectively lead and minister in the public church.

However, Naidoo (2021) warns:

For integrative education to become a reality it must first have an educational strategy that is significantly related to context, including the cultural, social, economic and political contexts, where learning objectives come from the *real world*. (p. 64)

#### 7. The public theology approach or method

The emphasis of the CF-LD approach on character and leadership development makes it possible to focus on developing leadership qualities and character qualities that are needed for full functioning in a public square. A public theology approach demands that preparation of ministers is linked to specific characters and qualities that interact with the challenges people are facing in their lives.

The focus on character and leadership makes the CF-LD model attractive for the public church because the approach is designed to develop ministerial competencies that are

required to ‘jointly explore life with people while journeying with them’ (Magezi 2021:153). Magezi (2021:153) refers to such leaders as possessing ‘the strength of vulnerability’ as they ‘think with and feel with’ other people from different contexts (Magezi 2021). This is contrary to pastors being viewed as dispensers of blessings, which is tantamount to being manufacturers of God’s grace and power.

### The relevance of the Character Formation cum Leadership Development Model in character formation and leadership development

Hardy (2016) says:

The primary task of theological education is to shape the lives of those who are followers of Jesus so that they can be used by God as leaders and influencers for the good of the kingdom. (p. 20)

This notion explains why the primary relevance of the CF-LD model revolves around its focus on *paideia*, that is, the internal formation of character, as opposed to the external praxeology. As *paideia* focuses on producing a product (pastoral leader) of quality, it also shapes the product into a ‘substance’ of reputable leadership competencies and character that can engage the community in social transformation. What *paideia* does in the process is a double: firstly, creating a pastoral leader who has desirable character and secondly, creating a pastoral leader who becomes an agent or leader of social change. The product, so formed, can attend to socio-economic matters affecting the people in the community. As the model has the capacity to equip the pastoral leaders with transformative and visionary skills, a computation of such skills with the right moral character should be able to challenge the socio-economic problems affecting the church.

### Conclusion

The article explored the relationship between character formation and leadership development in the context of theological education. The article takes note of the worrisome state of leadership in some Christian-related institutions and the questionable character qualities of the products that are produced from such institutions. It is noted that leadership challenges within theological institutions go hand in hand with character challenges of leaders leading those institutions, prompting the need to investigate the nature of relationship between character formation and leadership development.

Three research questions emerge out of this context. Firstly, why is character formation an important dimension for leader development? Secondly, how is character formation related to leader development in theological education? Thirdly, what model of theological education develops leaders of character who can function effectively in the public square? Three key terms are identified: leadership development, character formation and theological education, warranting the need to understand them in the context of the problem under

discussion. An appreciation of the meanings of leadership development, character formation and theological education helped to situate their implied meanings in the research problems.

The study found out that character formation is intricately related to leadership development. It was noted that character formation precedes leader development. It is an essential component for leadership development. As character formation is based on values, the study established that leader development cannot succeed in the absence of a character formation that is grounded in a firm value system. Developing leaders of character is one of the key benchmarks of any theological education institution. Therefore, there is a need to adopt a theological education model that is consonant with goals for both laity and pastoral leaders. The search for the right theological model is not an easy task. It calls for the need to borrow key concepts from theological models that have been developed and tested throughout history.

The CF-LD model was formed out of a synthesis of key concepts from the Athens model and the Leader Development models propounded by Kelsey (1993) and Easley (2014), respectively. The model, with its characteristic nature of being dialectical, reflective in its praxis, discipleship-informed and community-based, its unifying and integrative, its instructional and relational nature and its public theology approach, is proposed and recommended as the ideal theological education model that can develop character-based leaders. The study concludes that character formation and leadership development have a symbiotic bond in the practice of theological education.

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### Authors' contributions

M.V. and M.W., contributed equally to this article.

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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