



EFFECTS OF TRAIT AND LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS OF SERVANT LEADERS ON THE RELIGIOSITY & CULTURE OF FOLLOWERS

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Received: 01/03/2026

Accepted: 26/04/2026

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that leaders' traits and behaviours will affect the religiosity of Christian followers in religious education. A questionnaire was developed to measure the traits, visionary and empowerment leadership behaviours, and religiosity with reference to the Bible and leadership theories. Four hundred respondents from more than 150 churches in Hong Kong responded to the questionnaire. Confirmatory Factor Analysis confirmed the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The hypotheses proposed were supported by the Structural Equation Model. This study found that the broad trait consisting of six dimensions, namely, Commitment, Humility, Resilience, Integrity, Service, and Teamwork, has a positive association with vision and empowerment behaviours of church leaders. The spirituality of Christians is positively associated with both the traits and leadership behaviours of church leaders. The findings suggest that churches should place greater emphasis on grooming and mobilising more members to become leaders with the appropriate traits and leadership behaviours, leading to the successful achievement of religiosity and fostering the collaborative culture by the followers.

KEYWORDS: *Trait, Leadership Behaviours, Servant Leaders, Religiosity, Collaborative Culture, Followers*

1. INTRODUCTION

The religiosity of Christians is profoundly important, influencing individual identity, the purpose of life, satisfaction and well-being, moral development, community relations, social justice, and enabling churches to achieve their mission in religious education in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. As a vital component of personal lives and society at large, religiosity not only enhances the spiritual well-being of individuals but also contributes to the betterment of communities and churches and the promotion of ethical standards. By engaging in religious practices and adhering to Christian values, believers cultivate resilience, community-mindedness, and a commitment to justice, thereby enhancing life satisfaction and advancing the Church's great mission. In a rapidly changing world, a Christian may experience many challenges to their faith and way of living. To face these challenges, the importance of religiosity remains a cornerstone of Christian life and an enduring force for good.

From the Bible, it can be seen that leaders chosen by God, such as Moses, Jesus Christ, and the apostles, have had a great impact on the development of the Church and Christianity. After the establishment of the Church, great leaders such as Martin Luther and John Wesley profoundly impact on the spiritual development of churches. Leaders' traits and behaviours are the crucial factors in these great leaders' profound impact on the development of churches and the religiosity of followers. In addition to the ceremonies and rituals organised by churches, leadership plays a vital role in shaping the religious experiences of followers within Christian communities. This paper aims to elucidate how specific traits and leadership behaviours of leaders contribute to enhancing the religiosity of Christian followers by reviewing the Bible and the literature. A theoretical framework is proposed with reference to the literature reviewed. A cross-sectional study is conducted to validate the theoretical framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Leadership Trait

2.1.1 Trait as an Important Aspect from the Perspective of Leadership Research

The trait approach dominated the study of leadership before 1948 (Antonakis et al., 2004; Stogdill, 1948; Zaccaro, 2007). In the early part of the twentieth century, researchers used

“personality tests” to identify leadership traits. Stogdill (1948) reviewed leadership studies from 1904 to 1947 using the trait approach to identify a reliable and coherent pattern among leaders. The publication of Stogdill's paper in 1948 marked a turning point in the study of leadership, leading to a decline in the popularity of the leadership trait theory approach (Zaccaro, 2007).

Recently, the leader trait approach has regained its importance in the study of leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Zaccaro, 2007). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) posited that certain leadership traits—such as drive, achievement, ambition, energy, initiative, motivation, honesty, integrity, self-confidence, and cognitive ability—are crucial for effective leadership. In a study by Bono and Judge (2004), the connection between personality and both transformational and transactional leadership styles was explored. Their analysis of 26 independent studies revealed that personality traits, as defined by the Big Five Model, are linked to multiple dimensions of transformational and transactional leadership. Additionally, research by Sun and Shang (2019) indicated a connection between the trait of agreeableness and servant leadership. The Big Five traits highlighted in these studies are widely recognised in personality and psychology research; however, they were not specifically selected based on theories of effective church leadership or the concept of servant leadership.

Research studies on leadership found that the following traits of leaders are associated with effective leaders: Commitment (Nguyen et al., 2024; Omer et al., 2022); Humility (Kelemen et al., 2023; Rigolizzo et al., 2022); Resilience (Lawrence et al., 2023); Integrity (Salmela & Hemberg, 2026; Yazdanshenas & Mirzaei, 2023); Service (Demeke et al., 2024; Shaasha et al., 2024); and Teamwork (Aliekperova & Aliekperov, 2023; Du et al., 2022). Incidentally, these 6 traits of good Christian Leadership form the Acronym “CHRIST”.

2.1.2 Traits as an Important Aspect of Leaders from the Perspective of the Bible

Leadership in religious contexts often requires particular traits aligned with spiritual and moral guidance. In the Bible, figures such as Moses, Jesus Christ, and St. Paul exemplify qualities that not only shaped their own ministries but also left a profound impact on generations of believers. This essay explores the importance of these leadership traits, illustrating how they contribute

to effective leadership and inspire faith communities.

Moses: Vision, Resilience, Perseverance and Humility

Moses is a great leader in the Old Testament. One of his most significant traits was vision, as he was tasked with the monumental responsibility of leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 3:10).

Equally important was Moses's resilience and perseverance. Opposition from the Pharaoh and leading a large, often discontented group through the wilderness proved challenging, requiring perseverance and resilience. Despite numerous obstacles, including the Israelites' lack of faith, Moses remained steadfast, resilient, and persevering (Exodus; Hebrews 11:27).

Moses is very humble, described as very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). With the support of a vision from God and the traits of humility, perseverance and resilience, Moses achieved his mission as a great leader in the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ: Compassion and Traits of a Servant Leader

Jesus Christ epitomises the ideal traits of compassionate and servant leadership. Compassion was central to His ministry. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus demonstrated empathy toward the marginalised, healing the sick and advocating for the oppressed (Mark 6:34).

Moreover, Jesus modelled servant leadership, a trait that sets His leadership style apart. He articulated this principle when He stated in Matthew 20:26-28, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." By washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17), Jesus provided a profound example of humility and service, emphasising that true leadership is found in serving others.

Jesus demonstrated His commitment to glorify and accomplish the work of God (John 17:4; 6:38; Luke 0:51). As the son of God, He showed His humility to empty Himself and to take the form of a servant and become obedient to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:5-8). He described himself as gentle and humble and taught His disciples to follow (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus preached in various cities, but people did not repent. However, He demonstrated His resilience, praised the Heavenly Father, and continued His mission without discouragement (Matthew 11: 20-30). In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, facing the suffering ahead while submitting to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39), and finally completed His mission by being crucified and raised from the dead.

Jesus demonstrated His integrity, sinlessness and truthfulness (John 8:46) and taught His disciples to live with integrity and to tell the truth (Matthew 5:37).

Jesus travels with a group of disciples and women who supported and participated in ministry. He grooms 12 apostles by living and travelling with them throughout His mission, and sends them out with authority and instructions (Matthew 10:1-8). Jesus gives the disciples responsibility and partnership in discipling all nations through the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). All the above actions reflect the importance of teamwork that Jesus attached to developing his followers.

The above scriptures support the view that Jesus is a servant leader, demonstrating the importance of commitment, humility, resilience, integrity, service, and teamwork.

St. Paul: Passion and Adaptability

St. Paul, an apostle who played a vital role in spreading Christianity, demonstrated passion and adaptability in his leadership. His intense devotion to the Gospel is clear in Romans 1:16, where he declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." Paul's steadfast passion energised his mission and inspired others to follow their faith.

Moreover, Paul's adaptability allowed him to navigate diverse cultural contexts effectively. He understood the importance of contextualising his message for different audiences, as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." This trait is vital for leaders who face multifaceted challenges, emphasising the need to tailor approaches to meet the unique needs of different groups.

There are many scriptures supporting that Paul is a servant leader with commitment (Acts 20:24; Philippians 3:7-14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8), humility (1 Corinthians 15: 9-10; Philippians 2:5-8; Galatians 2:20), resilience (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; Romans 5:3-5), integrity (Acts 24:16; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2), service (Philippians 2:17-18; Romans 15:16), and teamwork (Romans 16:1-16; Philippians 2:19-30).

The above review supports the importance of commitment, humility, resilience, integrity, service, and teamwork as essential traits of church leaders.

2.2 Leadership Behaviours

The study of leaders' behaviours is another important aspect of leadership. The inadequacy of the trait approach ushered in a new wave of leadership research in terms of leadership behaviour (Bass, 1985; Bass & Stogdill, 1990;

Chemers, 1984; Desler & Robbins, 1993; Hollander, 1978; Vecchio, 1995). One of the first and most famous studies of leadership style was conducted by Lewin, Lippitt and White in 1939 (Vecchio, 1995). They classified leadership styles into three types: democratic, autocratic and laissez faire. The importance of this study was not so much in its results but in its definition of leadership in terms of behavioural patterns. There are many other research studies using the behavioural approach to study the effects of leadership, such as the Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Hemphill, 1950; Hemphill & Coons, 1954). In these studies, behaviours of leaders are usually divided into two dimensions, such as task and people orientation (Gibson et al., 1976); four dimensions of support, interaction facilitation, goal emphasis, and work facilitation (Bowers & Seashore, 1966).

Contingency theories of leadership were proposed after the study of leaders' behaviours, suggesting that leadership behaviours depend on the appropriateness between the characteristics of the leader and the situation to establish the linkage between leadership behaviour and effectiveness (Chemers, 1984).

According to the above leadership theories, this study proposes that certain leadership theories and dimensions of leadership behaviours are needed to achieve effectiveness, contingent on the context and situation of the Church. Based on a review of contemporary leadership theories and the teachings of the Bible, it is proposed that certain dimensions of servant leaders' behaviours are most relevant to the leadership of church leaders in this study.

2.3 Visionary Leadership

2.3.1 *Visionary Leadership as an Important Dimension of Church Leaders' Behaviours*

Visionary leadership, defined broadly as the capacity to articulate a compelling future, align people and resources toward that future, and sustain momentum through changing circumstances, has become an important focus in organisational theory and leadership studies. Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that inspires and motivates followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes. One of the critical components of transformational leadership is vision (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). According to transformational leadership theory, a clear and compelling vision not only guides the leader but also influences the organisation and its members, motivating them to exceptional performance (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Visionary leadership is also an important

dimension of servant leadership theory (Liden et al., 2008).

In the context of congregational life and ecclesial ministry, visionary leadership acquires particular significance. Church leaders operate at the intersection of spiritual formation, communal identity, social mission, and institutional stewardship; each of these domains benefits from the ability to cast and steward a compelling vision.

Visionary leadership is an essential dimension of effective church leadership because it grounds mission and identity, mobilises and sustains congregational engagement, facilitates adaptive change in complex environments, fosters discipleship and spiritual formation, and ensures faithful stewardship across generations. The argument is supported by theological reflection, organisational theory, and practical pastoral considerations.

2.3.2 *Theological Foundations: Jesus as a Visionary Leader*

Churches are not merely voluntary associations or civic organisations; they are communities shaped by theological claims about God, Christ, and God's purposes in the world. Visionary leadership in the church must therefore begin with theological clarity. Scripture itself presents vision-centred leadership models (e.g., prophetic and apostolic voices, Jesus' kingdom proclamations) that link eschatological hope with present practice. A church leader who can translate theological convictions into an intelligible, shared vision helps the congregation situate its ministries within the narrative arc of redemption—what the community is for and what it is becoming. This theological anchoring prevents visions from degenerating into mere programmatic goals or culturally driven projects; it orients direction toward purposes intrinsic to the Christian identity, such as worship, disciple-making, justice, and proclamation.

A review of the four Gospels shows that Jesus is a visionary leader. He shares a clear and inspiring vision of the kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17; 13: 31-32; 25: 34), the actions needed by His disciples to realise the coming of the Kingdom of God by serving (Mark 10:45), evangelising (Matthew 28: 19-20) and the power of Holy Spirit for disciples to realise the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:8). A compelling vision provides direction and motivates followers to engage more deeply with their faith practices. Leaders who articulate a vision that resonates with the core values of Christianity can stimulate greater participation in religious activities, fostering a vibrant community.

2.3.3 Mobilizing and Sustaining Congregational Engagement

A central practical benefit of visionary leadership is its capacity to mobilise people. Congregations often comprise diverse members with differing gifts, commitments, and life stages. Vision provides a rallying point—a common narrative and set of priorities that enable voluntary cooperation. Social-psychological research on collective action and organisational commitment indicates that people are more likely to invest time and resources when they perceive their contributions as meaningful within a larger, coherent project. In church contexts, a well-communicated vision grounds volunteer formation propels ministry initiatives, and helps prioritise scarce resources. Moreover, by casting a compelling picture of a preferred future, leaders can maintain morale and perseverance through routine fatigue or crisis; congregants who see their small labors contributing to a larger redemptive story are more likely to remain engaged.

2.3.4 Ethical and Missional Accountability: Integrity and Discernment

Visionary leadership, properly understood, also requires ethical accountability and theological discernment. A compelling vision that is theologically shallow or ethically compromised can lead a congregation astray. Thus, part of a leader's responsibility is to subject visions to communal discernment—testing directions against Scripture, tradition, and the congregation's concrete context. Visionary leadership that ensures fidelity to gospel priorities in innovative expressions of ministry will help develop followers' religiosity in the contemporary world.

Hence, based on the above review of the literature, it is proposed that the visionary leadership behaviour of church leaders will enhance followers' religiosity.

2.4 Empowerment Leadership

2.4.1 Empowerment as an important behaviour of Leaders

Empowerment leadership, an approach that seeks to enable, equip, and release others to take initiative and exercise responsibility, has gained prominence in leadership theory and practice across secular and faith-based contexts. In the context of an organisation, empowerment is closely tied to workers' commitment (Borrego & Orgambidez, 2024). Empowerment stands as a vital element in both transformational leadership (Tsang et al., 2022) and servant leadership (Allen et al., 2018; Van der Hoven et al., 2021), acting as a

powerful driver of motivation, innovation, and a collaborative culture within organisations. By empowering their teams, leaders cultivate not only individual growth and engagement but also bolster overall organisational effectiveness.

Within congregational settings, empowerment leadership aligns with theological commitments to the priesthood of all believers, the distribution of spiritual gifts, and communal discipleship (Braojos et al., 2024). This study argues that empowerment leadership is essential for two interrelated outcomes in church life: (1) sustainable church growth (numerical, spiritual, and missional), and (2) the deepening of followers' religiosity (their religious beliefs, practices, identity, and spiritual maturity).

Drawing on leadership theory, organisational studies, and pastoral theology, this study proposes that empowerment leadership fosters congregational vitality by mobilising lay gifts, cultivating spiritual formation, enabling adaptive ministry, increasing retention and engagement, and enhancing the religiosity of followers.

Servant leaders focus on developing their team members' skills, providing opportunities for education and advancement. Empowerment is an essential leadership behaviour of servant leadership on church spiritual growth (Shaasha et al., 2024). By prioritising employees' development, servant leaders create an empowered workforce that is prepared to meet challenges and contribute meaningfully to the organisation. Research by Liden et al. (2008) demonstrates that servant leadership positively influences team performance through enhanced trust and collaboration resulting from empowering practices. Servant leadership emphasises building trust and strong relationships within teams. Empowering followers to take on responsibility fosters a collaborative culture where team members support one another. This collaboration is essential for achieving shared goals and enhancing overall team effectiveness.

The empowering principles embedded in transformational and servant leadership play a significant role in fostering resilience and enhancing well-being in service-oriented organisations (Maula-Bakhsh & Raziq, 2018). Moreover, research indicates that servant leadership coupled with empowerment has been effective in promoting spiritual growth within congregations (Shaasha et al., 2024). When congregations feel empowered, they often exhibit a surge in service initiatives, innovative ministries, and enriched fellowship. When members are given responsibilities, they typically experience a stronger sense of ownership and

commitment to the Church, greatly enhancing their religiosity.

2.4.2 Support from the Bible

In Ecclesial contexts, empowerment leadership is informed by theological motifs—such as gifting (1 Corinthians 12), servanthood (Mark 10:45), and the formation of disciples who embody the gospel—so that empowerment not only accomplishes organisational ends but also contributes to spiritual formation. A review of the Bible shows that Jesus exercised empowerment leadership to develop His disciples to fulfil His mission. He gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (Luke 9:1-2). He empowers followers to become apostles, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12). He empowers His followers to become friends and not servants (John 15:15).

The primary mechanism linking empowerment leadership to church growth is the mobilisation of lay gifts. Congregations typically contain a diversity of competencies—teaching, pastoral care, administration, hospitality, evangelism, and technical skills—that remain underutilised under highly centralised leadership models. By intentionally identifying, training, and delegating responsibilities to lay members, empowerment leaders expand the church's ministry capacity without proportionate increases in staff or budget. Empirically, churches that engage lay volunteers in meaningful ministries tend to offer a broader range of programs and outreach initiatives, increasing their reach into communities and thereby creating conditions conducive to numerical and missional growth. From a theological perspective, mobilising gifts honours the scriptural vision of a church as a body in which each member contributes to common life (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12).

2.4.3 Enhancing Followers' Religiosity through Ownership and Practice

Religiosity, understood as the combination of belief, ritual practice, religious identity, and moral commitment, is fostered not merely by passive exposure to teaching but by active participation in religious life. Empowerment leadership deepens religiosity by creating opportunities for embodied practice: liturgical roles, small-group leadership, service ministries, or community outreach that requires participants to enact theological convictions. Social-psychological research on behavioural commitment suggests that active participation increases internalisation of values and identity. In church contexts, when congregants are trusted with responsibilities that matter, they often report heightened spiritual

growth, increased prayer and devotional life, and stronger identification with the church's mission. Thus, empowerment converts nominal affiliation into lived discipleship, strengthening both private piety and public witness.

Based on the above review of the literature and the Bible, it is proposed that the empowerment behaviour of church leaders will enhance followers' religiosity.

2.5 Service Experience and Religiosity

God equips Christians to serve in different roles so that they can become mature in spirituality (Ephesians 4: 11-13). Jesus called Peter to serve (Matthew 4: 18-19), and Peter grew in spirituality after his experience of serving for three years by following Jesus in His mission (Matthew 16: 15-17; Acts: 2:14). The above verses show that Christians' spirituality will grow through their experience in serving.

Research also supports the idea that Christians experience transformation in religiosity through service and religious experiences (Hugen et al., 2006; Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009). Hence, this study proposes that Christians with experience in serving will exhibit greater religiosity, and those with more experience in faith will exhibit higher religiosity.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The above review of the literature and the teachings of the Bible conclude that trait, visionary leadership, empowerment of leaders and service experience will enhance the religiosity of church members. A theoretical framework is shown in Figure-1.

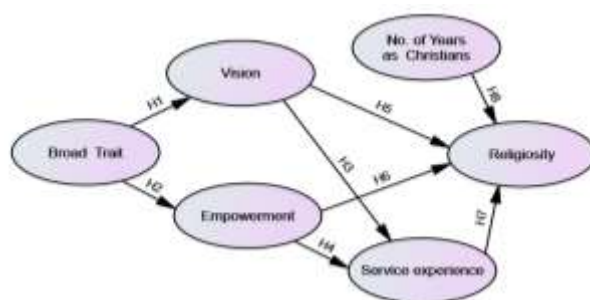


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

- Hypothesis-1:** Broad trait of church leaders will enhance their visionary leadership behaviour.
- Hypothesis-2:** Broad Trait of church leader will enhance their empowerment leadership behaviour.
- Hypothesis-3:** Visionary leadership of church leaders will enhance the service experience of followers.

- Hypothesis-4:** Empowerment leadership of church leaders will enhance the service experience of followers.
- Hypothesis-5:** Visionary leadership of church leaders will enhance the religiosity of followers.
- Hypothesis-6:** Empowerment leadership of church leaders will enhance the religiosity of followers.
- Hypothesis-7:** Experience in serving in church will enhance the religiosity of church members.
- Hypothesis-8:** Years of faith will enhance the religiosity of church members.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Development of the Measurement Scale

This research used a cross-sectional survey with a questionnaire developed to measure the six constructs, using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The development of instruments went through the following stages:

1. Review of related literature and instruments already developed;
2. Proposing constructs related to this study and defining the constructs to be measured;
3. Developing instruments according to the proposed construct and situation of Churches in Hong Kong and with reference to instruments used by other studies;
4. Seeking comments from some focused groups and professionals with relevant experience and expertise to refine the proposed instruments;
5. Collection of data to validate the instruments;
6. Confirmatory Factor Analyses for validating the instruments;
7. Using the Structural Equation Model to investigate the relationships among variables according to the proposed theoretical framework.

4.2 MEASURES

4.2.1 Broad Trait (the variable is referred to as "trait" hereafter)

This study defines the broad trait of church leaders as the relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, values, feelings and behaviours that reflect the tendency to respond in relatively coherent ways to serve and lead others across a variety of group and organisational situations. Traits are a multidimensional and multi-level construct (Eysenck, 1991).

4.2.5 Service

Chui and Lee (2024) developed a scale to measure six specific traits related to church leadership: Commitment, Humility, Resilience, Integrity, Service, and Teamwork. Confirmatory Factor Analysis supported the validity and reliability of the six specific traits. Furthermore, a broad trait, serving as a second-order factor for the six specific traits, was found to have good psychometric properties for measuring leadership traits among social workers (Chui et al., 2026). Hence, this study adopts the broad trait as a measure of church leaders' traits and proposes that these traits will enhance the religiosity of church members as a hypothesis. Twenty-four items were used to measure the broad trait, with four items measuring each specific dimension. A simple broad trait uses 6 items, with one selected from each dimension.

4.2.2 Vision (the variable is referred to as "Vision" hereafter)

Vision is defined as the leadership behaviour of a church leader who has been identified by a respondent as demonstrating leadership in sharing the church's vision and mission according to the Bible in relation to the contemporary challenges faced by the Church. Four items were developed in accordance with the definition. Two examples are: 'The leader has a clear understanding of the mission of the Church', and 'The leader leads members to face the challenges from society according to the Bible'.

4.2.3 Empowerment (the variable is referred to as "Empowerment" hereafter)

Empowerment is defined as the behaviour of a church leader who has been identified by a respondent as having leadership in motivating members to take up service in the church by providing encouragement and training to develop their potential for serving with self-efficacy. Five items were developed in accordance with the definition. Two examples are: 'The leader encourages me to serve in the Church' and 'The leader provides training for my service in the Church'.

4.2.4 Religiosity

This study defines Religiosity as the belief and practice of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, nurtured by prayer, worship, and study of the Scriptures, with the goal of growing closer to God and understanding His will for their lives. There are six items in Chinese that measure respondents' religiosity. Two examples are 'I always pray', and 'I live according to the teachings of the Bible'.

Service is defined as having experience of serving in the church. One item asks respondents whether they have the experience.

4.2.6 Years of Faith

Years of faith is defined as the number of years that the respondent has been a Christian in the Church. One item asks respondents to report the number of years of faith in the Church.

5. SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

The questionnaire was distributed online to Christians at different time slots in September 2024. Respondents were asked to complete an online version of the questionnaire. A total of 400 completed responses were received and analysed from Christians coming from 150 churches in Hong Kong. There are around 1000 churches in Hong Kong; the sample covers Christians from around 15% of the churches in Hong Kong.

This study collected demographic data of the respondents in line with the suggestion to include the norm groups (Cutting & Walsh, 2008). There are 400 respondents, all ethnic Chinese from 67 Christian churches in Hong Kong. 176 (44%) of respondents are male, and 224 (56%) are female. Table-1 and Table-2 show the age distribution and the years of accepting Christianity, respectively. 220 (55%) of respondents have experience in taking up some services in the Church and 180 (45%) have no service experience. The ages range from under 20 to over 60, with 44.5% below age 50, 16.8% below age 30, and 10% below age 20. The above age distribution is quite similar to the 2024 census, which showed that 13.2% of church members in Hong Kong are young. 37% of respondents have attended church for less than 20 years, and 11.3% for less than 5 years. 55% of respondents have experience in serving in the church, with 69.5% of respondents having less than 10 years of experience in serving.

5.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Frequency Table

Age	N	%
20 and below	40	10.0
21 - 30	27	6.8
31 - 40	30	7.5
41 - 50	81	20.3
51 - 60	112	28.0
60+	110	27.5
Total	400	100.0

Table 2: Years become a Christian

Years	N	%
5 and below	39	9.8
6 - 10	24	6.0
11 - 20	65	16.3
21- 30	89	22.3
30+	183	45.8
Total	400	100.0

5.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

A confirmatory factor analysis with AMOS Version 31 was conducted to test the validity of model. The results of analyses support the distinct factors with an excellent fit (CFI=0.946; IFI=0.9475; RMSEA=0.065). The standardised regression weights of all items on the factors range from 0.664 to 0.901. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the scales is all above 0.870. Hence, the measurement model has good reliability and validity.

5.3 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

To test the validity of Hypotheses 1 to 8 of this study, a structural equation model is proposed based on the theoretical model for analysis using AMOS Version 31. The goodness-of-fit indices of the SEM Model are excellent (CFI=0.943, IFI=0.943; RMSEA=0.066), providing strong support for the theoretical model. The percentage of variance of vision, empowerment, and religiosity are 74.1%, 44.4% and 20.5%, respectively. Table-3 shows the standardised direct and total effects among the variables.

Table 3: Standardised Direct Effect (DE) and Total Effect (TE) between Constructs

	Trait		Vision		Empowerment		Service	Years as Christians
	DE	TE	DE	TE	DE	TE	TE	TE
<i>Vision</i>	.861*	.861*						
<i>Empowerment</i>	.665*	.665*						
<i>service</i>	0	0.011	ns	ns	.270*	.270*		
<i>Religiosity</i>	0	.272*	.282*	.282*	ns	.044*	.165*	.252*

p<0.001. All figures are significant at 0.001

5.4 Relationships between Variables

Table-3 reveals a significant direct and total effect of 0.861 from trait on vision. These findings strongly support Hypothesis-1, which states that broad trait of church leaders will enhance their visionary leadership behaviour.

Trait has a significant direct effect and total effect of 0.665 on empowerment. These findings strongly support Hypothesis-2, which states that the broad trait of church leaders will enhance their empowerment leadership behaviour.

Vision has no significant direct effect and total effect on service. These findings do not support Hypothesis-3, which states that visionary leadership of church leaders will enhance the service experience of followers.

Empowerment has a significant direct effect and total effect of 0.270 on service experience. These findings support Hypothesis-4, which posits that empowering leadership by church leaders will enhance followers' service experience. Vision has a significant direct effect and total effect of 0.282 on religiosity. These findings support Hypothesis-5, which posits that visionary leadership by church leaders will enhance followers' religiosity.

Empowerment has no significant direct effect but a significant total effect of 0.044 on religiosity. These findings support Hypothesis-6, which posits that empowerment leadership among church leaders will enhance followers' religiosity. The findings show that the effects of empowerment leadership on religiosity are through the intervening variable of service experience.

Service has a significant direct effect and total effect of 0.165 on religiosity. These findings support Hypothesis-7, which states that experience in serving in the church will enhance the religiosity of church members.

Years of faith have a significant direct effect and total effect of 0.252 on religiosity. These findings strongly support Hypothesis-8, which states that years of faith will enhance the religiosity of church members.

6. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study investigates the effect of traits and leadership behaviours of church leaders on followers' religiosity. In this study, the leader may be a formal leader with a position of authority in the Church, such as a pastor, or an informal leader who holds no formal role in the Church. The findings of this study show that the traits of servant leaders, including Commitment, Humility, Resilience, Integrity, Service and Teamwork—forming a broad trait as found in a previous study (Chui et al., 2025)—have significant effects on two leadership behaviours, namely, vision and empowerment, service experience of followers and religiosity. The findings support the trait leadership theory in religious education.

According to the contingency theory of leadership, the effectiveness of leadership traits and behaviours depends on the context and environmental factors. Based on a review of the Bible and servant leadership theory, Jesus can be interpreted as the best example of a servant leader. Servant leaders are also appropriate for the environment and context of churches and Christian organisations. The effectiveness of servant leader traits and behaviours in enhancing followers' religiosity demonstrates that servant leadership is an appropriate leadership theory for churches and Christian organisations.

The relationship between traits and behaviours, as suggested in some integrative model of leadership (Eva et al., 2019), is supported in this study. The significant total effects of the broad trait of servant leadership on leadership behaviours and followers' religiosity reflect the importance of identifying leaders with the appropriate traits, as measured in this study. The result is also consistent with the teachings of the Bible and the trait leadership theory, which holds that traits are important elements of a leader.

The findings support all hypotheses except Hypothesis-3. Vision does not significantly

associate with service experience, hence not supporting Hypothesis-3. However, it has a significant effect on religiosity, supporting Hypothesis-5. The results show that each dimension of leadership behaviour may have different effects on different outcomes.

Service experience is positively associated with empowerment leadership according to Hypothesis-4. The result can be interpreted in light of the nature of empowerment behaviour, which involves empowering and encouraging followers to develop their potential and take on important roles. Followers under the influence of empowerment leadership will be motivated to develop their potential through taking up service, hence supporting Hypothesis-4.

In addition to contributing to leadership theory and supporting servant leadership as a theory suitable for churches, the findings of this study have several important implications for the Church and Christian organisations. To achieve their mission, Churches and Christian organisations may need to focus on developing key leadership traits and behaviours in their leaders through training programs. Developing appropriate leadership traits and skills in vision sharing and empowering others can positively impact followers' development in religiosity and engagement in serving to achieve the mission.

Church leaders should embody positive leadership traits, including commitment, humility, integrity, resilience, service and teamwork to inspire followers. This modelling can enhance the spiritual and moral development of their congregations, creating a spiritual environment according to the teachings of the Bible, and witnessing the abundant blessings from God to every member of the Church.

Effective leadership of vision sharing and empowering followers may lead to higher participation in church activities and services. Leaders who demonstrate passion and commitment can motivate followers to deepen their involvement and develop themselves into servant leaders, leading to a possible chain reaction of rapidly increasing the number of leaders, resembling the rapid expansion of the early Church.

The findings also have important implications for Bible Seminaries and institutions for training pastors. Emphasis should be placed on designing leadership courses for developing servant leadership traits and behaviours. In addition to teaching theory, mentors who possess servant leadership traits and behaviours should be available to teach students during the practicum how to acquire these traits and behaviours, leading to the successful achievement of

religiosity and fostering the collaborative culture by the followers.

7. LIMITATIONS

This study is a cross-sectional study supporting the proposed theoretical framework in religious education. However, it cannot prove the causal relationship between variables. Further longitudinal studies are required to confirm the causal relationships between variables. This study obtains data from Christians in Hong Kong. The results may not apply to other countries with different cultures and contexts. Further studies in other countries may shed light on the applicability of this study's findings across different situations and cultures.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The investigations were conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (1975, revised in 2013). According to point 23 of this declaration, approval must be obtained from the local Ethical Committee or Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting the research, ensuring that the study adheres to both national and international guidelines. More information can be found at: https://www.mdpi.com/ethics#_bookmark9

Ethical approval was granted by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Gratia Christian College with the details listed below. Written informed consents were obtained and recorded. This research is not involved in any tests on human bodies, there is no need for ethics approval and consent to participate.

Ethic Committee Name: Gratia Christian College Research and Ethical Committee

Approval Code: ERA 2024001

Approval Date: 2024-2-12

Consent for Publication

The Authors hereby provide consent for publication by the Publisher.

Availability of Data and Material

The Data and Raw Materials deployed in this research are available for access (under copyright) by the Corresponding Author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares NO conflict of interest. There are no other third parties in the design of the study, in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Funding Declaration

This work was supported by the Gratia Christian College Research Office, without external funding

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