

# The Kind of Person God Uses to Catalyze a Movement: Traits and Competencies of Effective Movement Catalysts

The logo for the Evangelical Missiological Society (ems) is located in the top right corner. It consists of the lowercase letters "ems" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font, enclosed within a dark blue circle.

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## 1. Introduction

We define a movement as a rapid indigenous multiplication of disciples making disciples and churches planting churches in multiple streams within a people group to the fourth generation. What traits and competencies characterize pioneers who have been instrumental in catalyzing a movement? What traits and competencies distinguish these effective movement catalysts from those who have not catalyzed a movement? These two questions form the basis of an extensive Catalyst Competence Research project by Bethany Research Institute in 2020-21.

The study had a sample size of 307 pioneer missionaries, of which 147 had catalyzed a movement and the remaining 160 had not. Participants represented the largest megacultures of the world, with a focus on the regions or groupings where most movements have occurred, specifically Francophone Africa, East Africa, India, Indonesia, Latin America, and Ethnic Chinese.

Participants completed an online survey with 95 questions. Forty-five of them also gave in-depth interviews.

## 2. Developing a List of Traits and Competencies

Based on a review of the relevant literature on empirical leadership studies and apostolic and movement leadership (including Prinz, 2016; 2022), a list was developed of 24 trait and competency constructs. These 24 constructs were grouped into three domains, as shown in Table 1 on the next page.

1. The “Big Five” domain, consisting of traits and competencies related to personality and character
2. The “Spiritual” domain, consisting of traits and competencies of a spiritual nature, to do with one’s relationship to God
3. The “Socio-Influential” domain: traits and competencies having to do with relating with others, describing social behavior and ways to influence others

**Table 1: Trait and Competency Constructs, Grouped into Three Domains**

<b>Section 1: Individual traits and competencies</b> <b>(“Big Five” domain)</b>	<b>Section 2: Spiritual traits and competencies</b> <b>(“Spiritual” domain)</b>	<b>Section 3: Social Influence traits and competencies</b> <b>(“Socio-Influential” domain)</b>
1. Openness to experience	1. Hunger for God	1. Extroversion
2. Creativity	2. Listening to God	2. Assertiveness
3. Drive to achieve	3. Evangelistic Zeal	3. Inspiring Personality
4. Conscientiousness	4. Expectant Faith	4. Influencing Beliefs
5. Internal locus of control	5. Fervent Intercession	5. Inspiring Shared Vision
6. Persistence	6. Tangible Love	(Number 6 was cut after pretest)
7. Agreeableness	7. Confidence in Locals	7. Disciple-making
8. Flexibility	8. Confidence in the Bible	8. Empowering
9. Emotional stability		

In a pretest, a survey with 125 questions (25 trait and competency constructs measured through five questions each) was administered to a pretest group of 181 students, missions agency staff and missionaries, and Global South missionaries around the world.

In the following tables we will present respondents' average self-ratings for the 24 trait and competency constructs (TCs) measured through 44 different questions. The traits and competencies are labeled TC1-1-1 through TC3-8-1. The numbering TC1 to TC3 is based on three domains described above.

### 3. Traits and Competencies at Construct Level

All the trait and competency constructs had been identified in the literature review as those universally correlated with leadership effectiveness by empirical research. So it does not come as a surprise that out of the 24 traits and competencies, effective catalysts rated themselves higher than non-catalysts for 21 of them. (In each case, the means difference between catalysts and non-catalysts was statistically significant.) For 13 of these, the difference between catalysts and control group was at least 1/3 of a Likert point ( $>0.33$ ), and for seven of them it was almost half a Likert point ( $>0.46$ ). The practical significance of a difference substantially below a half or one-third of a Likert point is unclear.

Table 2 on the next page shows the trait and competency constructs that mark effective movement catalysts, sorted by self-rating by catalysts in descending order. Traits and competencies identified in the leadership literature review as characteristic of effective leaders are also rated highly by the effective movement catalysts.

The only exceptions are the constructs at the bottom of the table, each with a rating lower than 4.0: *flexibility*, *extroversion*, and *emotional stability*. (The role of intercession will be discussed further below as there was a different reason for its low rating.)

**Table 2: Trait and Competency Constructs Sorted by Self-Rating**

Trait and Competency Constructs	Catalyst	Control	Difference	Standard Deviation	MWU test
TC2-7 Confidence in Locals	4.88	4.53	0.36	0.77	< 0.0001
TC2-8 Confidence in the Bible	4.77	4.39	0.37	0.81	< 0.0001
TC3-2 Assertiveness	4.77	4.29	0.48	0.84	< 0.0001
TC3-4 Influencing Beliefs	4.7	4.19	0.51	0.74	< 0.0001
TC1-4 Conscientiousness	4.69	4.41	0.29	0.85	0.0009
TC2-6 Genuine love	4.69	4.43	0.27	0.87	0.0115
TC2-3 Evangelistic Zeal	4.68	4.39	0.28	0.64	0.0003
TC2-4 Expectant Faith	4.67	4.36	0.31	0.94	< 0.0001
TC3-5 Inspiring Shared Vision	4.66	4.23	0.43	0.77	< 0.0001
TC3-7 Disciple-making	4.65	4.07	0.58	0.96	< 0.0001
TC3-8 Empowering	4.63	4.11	0.53	0.97	< 0.0001
TC1-7 Agreeableness	4.6	4.16	0.44	0.92	< 0.0001
TC3-3 Inspiring Personality	4.6	4.06	0.54	0.92	< 0.0001
TC2-1 Hunger for God	4.51	4.15	0.35	0.74	< 0.0001
TC2-2 Listening to God	4.51	4.16	0.35	0.74	0.0001
TC1-1 Openness to Experience	4.44	4.19	0.25	0.93	0.0302
TC1-5 Internal locus of control	4.43	4.11	0.32	0.99	0.0023
TC1-3 Drive to achieve	4.41	4.14	0.27	0.75	0.0074
Average of all traits and competencies	4.41	4.06	0.34	0.5	< 0.0001
TC1-2 Creativity	4.32	3.86	0.46	0.83	< 0.0001
TC1-6 Persistence	4.3	3.98	0.31	0.98	0.0213
TC2-5 Fervent Intercession	3.83	3.07	0.76	1.02	< 0.0001
TC1-8 Flexibility	3.47	3.63	-0.16	0.93	0.1213
TC3-1 Extroversion	3.27	3.37	-0.1	1.04	0.6919
TC1-9 Emotional stability	3.01	3.15	-0.14	1.2	0.1736

To try to understand the reasons why three traits and competencies were not verified, we offer some possible explanations. *Flexibility* brings strengths in certain situations, and potential weaknesses in others. Empirical studies have shown that leaders are universally marked by flexibility (Stogdill, 1984; 1974; House and Aditya, 1997); apparently this is less true of effective movement catalysts. Without further research, we are at this point unable to offer a clear explanation as to why this trait is not a significant marker of movement catalysts.

Extroversion is measured in this study on a behavioral level, not as a psychological inclination. At times, and as the situation demands, catalysts can be assertive, while at other times they may choose more introverted behaviors, giving space to others with the intent of empowering them. In balancing the two, catalysts may deliberately hold themselves back.

With regard to emotional stability, there is no apparent explanation as to why catalysts do not see themselves as very emotionally mature and stable, and able to regulate their emotions in ways helpful for interactions with others.

Looking at the list as a whole, practitioners will benefit as they see what are the traits and competencies of those pioneers that God uses to catalyze a movement. It will give them a basis for an honest self-assessment of how much they have developed each of these traits and competencies, and help them to identify their biggest gaps, and thus provide direction for their ongoing development.

## 4. Findings at the Question Level

In the process of crafting survey questions, each construct was operationalized, and questions were formulated that describe the affective or cognitive dispositions or the behavior of catalysts. Table 3 shows the 22 responses among all 44 survey questions, measuring trait and competency constructs where (a) catalysts rated themselves the highest ( $\geq 4.50$ ), (b) catalysts and control group show a statistically significant difference, and (c) that difference amounted to at least  $1/3$  of a Likert scale point ( $\geq 0.33$ ). Responses are sorted by catalyst self-rating in descending order.



**Table 3: Self-ratings for the 44 Questions Testing for Traits and Competencies  
Sorted by Highest Catalyst Ratings**

Questions measuring traits and competencies	Catalysts	Control group	Difference	MWU test (p value)
<b>TC2-1-3 Hunger for God</b> Deep down, I feel a hunger to know God more and to be closer to His heart. Qn37	4.93	4.61	0.33	<b>0.006</b>
<b>TC2-7-2 Confidence in Locals</b> I am confident that God grows and uses new disciples - He can use them as much or more than He can use me. Qn55	4.88	4.53	0.36	<b>0.005</b>
<b>TC2-2-2 Listening to God</b> I regularly spend time seeking God's guidance. Qn39	4.84	4.46	0.38	<b>0.004</b>
<b>TC2-3-3 Evangelistic Zeal</b> I regularly think about more effective ways we can share the Gospel. Qn43	4.78	4.4	0.38	<b>&lt;0.0001</b>
<b>TC3-5-3 Inspiring Shared Vision</b> To those around me, I express confidence that our goals will be achieved. Qn61	4.78	4.28	0.5	<b>0</b>
<b>TC1-3-4 Drive to Achieve</b> Setting and achieving goals motivates me. Qn38	4.78	4.26	0.52	<b>0</b>
<b>TC2-8-1 Confidence in the Bible</b> Others would describe me as someone who has a deep confidence in the power of the Bible for discipling and ministry. Qn67	4.77	4.39	0.37	<b>0.007</b>
<b>TC3-2-2 Assertiveness</b> I am motivated to influence and bring change, wherever I go. Qn63	4.77	4.29	0.48	<b>0</b>
<b>TC2-2-1 Listening to God</b> Others would describe me as a person who is strongly dependent on God for my life and ministry. Qn60	4.71	4.28	0.44	<b>0.003</b>
<b>TC3-4-4 Influencing Beliefs</b> I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others. Qn53	4.71	4.19	0.52	<b>&lt;0.0001</b>
<b>TC1-3-3 Drive to Achieve</b> Once I set a goal, I am motivated to work until I have attained it. Qn32	4.7	4.36	0.34	<b>0.005</b>

Table 3 continued on next page

Table 3 Continued

Questions measuring traits and competencies	Catalysts	Control group	Difference	MWU test (p value)
<b>TC3-4-1 Influencing Beliefs</b> I regularly talk about my most important values and beliefs. Qn62	4.7	4.19	0.51	<b>0.001</b>
<b>TC2-3-1 Evangelistic Zeal</b> Others would describe me as a person who is passionate about seeing as many people as possible saved. Qn63	4.68	4.35	0.33	<b>0</b>
<b>TC1-6-2 Persistence</b> When things get hard, I am tenacious and push through until the job is done. Qn34	4.68	4.27	0.41	<b>0.049</b>
<b>TC3-7-1 Disciple-making</b> My disciples give me the feedback that me discipling them has led to character formation and greater obedience to God. Qn48	4.65	4.07	0.58	<b>&lt;0.0001</b>
<b>TC3-8-1 Empowering Others</b> would describe me as someone who empowers others and develops their potential. Qn44	4.63	4.11	0.53	<b>0.004</b>
<b>TC1-7-2 Agreeableness</b> I am characterized by pleasant conversation and companionship. Qn40	4.6	4.16	0.44	<b>0.002</b>
<b>TC3-3-1 Inspiring Personality</b> People have said that they are proud of being associated with me. Qn70	4.6	4.06	0.54	<b>0.004</b>
<b>TC2-1-1 Hunger for God</b> Others would say that I love God passionately. Qn52	4.54	4.14	0.4	<b>0.001</b>
<b>TC3-5-2 Inspiring Shared Vision</b> I articulate a compelling vision of the future. Qn65	4.54	4.19	0.35	<b>&lt;0.0001</b>
<b>TC2-1-5 Hunger for God</b> I follow God, but I do not feel that I desire Him deeply. (inverted) Qn64	4.51	4.13	0.38	<b>0.005</b>
<b>TC2-5-5 Fervent Intercession</b> [coded] On average, I spend this many hours per week praying by myself or with others on behalf of our adopted people: Qn47	3.75	2.78	0.98	<b>0.002</b>

From this list in Table 3, we can glean best practices that distinguish effective catalysts from pioneers who have not catalyzed a movement. This takes the insights gleaned from Table 2 one level deeper. Not only do we see what the traits and competencies of effective movement catalysts are, but Table 3 identifies the specific affective and cognitive dispositions, practices and behaviors in the lives of those catalysts. They can be seen as a list of what in organizational behavior theory is termed Best Practices and what missions research has labeled Fruitful Practices (Woodberry 2011). These will benefit practitioners, as they will be able to identify practices and behaviors that have made a significant difference in enabling a movement to be catalyzed.

## 5. Differences between Same-Culture, Near-Culture, and Expatriate Catalysts

Table 4 below shows the trait and competency constructs distinguished by the origin of the main catalyst: he or she may be an expatriate, a member of a different people group near the group being reached (in the same country), or a member of the same people group. Although this distribution is not being used for the subsequent regression analysis, it is interesting to compare how each of these sub-groups ranked themselves. Differences were typically small. The table only shows the eight trait and competency constructs which exhibit a statistically significant difference between the three groups.

**Table 4: Trait and Competency Constructs by Origin of Main Catalyst**

Trait and Competency Constructs	Expat	Same country proximate people group	Same people group	All	Kruskal-Wallis test (p value)
TC1-7 Agreeableness	4.24	4.15	4.45	4.36	0.002
TC1-8 Flexibility	3.91	3.83	3.35	3.54	< 0.0001
TC1-9 Emotional stability	3.43	3.37	2.88	3.07	0.001
TC2-5 Fervent Intercession	3.09	3.26	3.54	3.41	0.008
TC3-1 Extroversion	3.7	3.55	3.15	3.32	0.002
TC3-3 Inspiring Personality	4.06	4.38	4.37	4.32	0.017
TC3-4 Influencing Beliefs	4.28	4.25	4.53	4.43	0.001
TC3-7 Disciple-making	4.06	4.37	4.41	4.34	0.006
<b>Average of all traits and competencies</b>	4.18	4.28	4.22	4.22	0.195



Note that expatriate catalysts rank significantly lower than their counterparts on *agreeableness*, *disciple-making*, and *intercession*. They rank higher on *emotional stability*, *flexibility*, and *extroversion*. The catalysts from the same country, interestingly, rank in the middle between expatriate and same people group catalysts for most traits and competencies. Where they rank considerably higher than both other groups is *drive to achieve*. Catalysts from the same people group rank lower than the other two groups in *flexibility* and *emotional stability*. They rate themselves higher than the other groups on *intercession* and *disciple-making*. Overall, given that only eight of the 24 traits and competencies showed a statistically significant difference between the three groups, and the average across all traits and competencies was not statistically significant, we conclude that catalysts from different cultural backgrounds have far more similarities than differences in the traits and competencies they exhibit.

## 6. Using Regression Analyses to Evaluate the Mutual Influence of Traits and Competencies and Inhibiting and Contributing Factors

In this section, we evaluate the influence of all explanatory variables included in the study on movement outcomes. While the study assumed that the traits and competencies of the movement pioneers would have a primary influence on movement outcomes, it also sought to measure other influencing factors that might be unrelated to the pioneers' traits.

These other factors were grouped as 11 “contributing factors,” denoting factors that would be expected to positively influence the catalyzing of a movement, and 10 “impeding factors,” describing factors that would typically hinder it. These 21 contributing and inhibiting factors can also be categorized as “internal” or “external.” Internal factors can be influenced by the pioneers themselves and/or their teams, while external factors are outside their immediate control and cannot be influenced directly (other than through prayer).

These variables were entered into a multivariate statistical analysis called regression analysis. A regression measures the simultaneous influence of several explanatory variables on a response variable (or outcome), to see which of these factors influence the outcome in a significant way.

The first regression (Table 5 on the next page) focuses on traits and competencies at the question level, which reflect specific behaviors or activities related to these traits and competencies. Accounting for sample size limitations, it includes a total of 33 factors: a) all questions related to four trait and competency constructs that were

significant in a previous analysis; b) the 22 trait and competency questions with the largest difference between the average response of all catalysts versus the average response of all control group members; c) the average of all contributing and inhibiting factors. The results indicate which items differentiate effective catalysts from those who did not catalyze a movement.

**Table 5: Traits and Competency Items (in Question Form) of Effective Catalysts that Differ Most Significantly from the Control Group**

Explanatory variable	Value	Standard error	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > Chi <sup>2</sup>	Wald Lower bound (95%)	Wald Upper bound (95%)
<b>TC3-4-4 Influencing Beliefs</b> MLQ I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others. Qn53	-0.91	0.238	14.654	0	-1.376	-0.444
<b>TC1-6-5 Persistence</b> I tend to stop trying when things get very hard. Qn50 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I don't give up, even when things get hard.	-0.512	0.203	6.375	0.012	-0.91	-0.115
<b>TC1-3-4 Drive to achieve</b> Setting and achieving goals motivates me. Qn38	-0.508	0.208	5.974	0.015	-0.915	-0.101
<b>TC2-8-1 Confidence in the Bible</b> Others would describe me as someone who has a deep confidence in the power of the Bible for discipling and ministry. Qn67	-0.483	0.228	4.485	0.034	-0.93	-0.036
<i>Average of all Contributing Factors</i>	-0.481	0.162	8.856	0.003	-0.798	-0.164
<b>TC2-5-5 Fervent Intercession</b> [coded] On average, I spend this many hours per week praying by myself or with others on behalf of our adopted people: Qn47	-0.452	0.143	10.029	0.002	-0.731	-0.172
<b>TC2-3-3 Evangelistic Zeal</b> I regularly think about more effective ways we can share the Gospel. Qn43	-0.407	0.207	3.871	0.049	-0.813	-0.002
<b>TC2-2-4 Listening to God</b> I am too busy with other things to wait on God and listen to Him. Qn51 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I regularly wait on God and listen to him.	0.346	0.178	3.767	0.052	-0.003	0.695
<b>TC1-3-1 Drive to achieve</b> Others would describe me as an achievement-oriented person. Qn35	0.457	0.195	5.494	0.019	0.075	0.839
<i>Average of all Inhibiting Factors</i>	0.499	0.139	12.88	0	0.226	0.771
<b>TC1-8-4 Flexibility</b> I find it hard to adapt to change. Qn41 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I adapt to change quickly.	0.627	0.197	10.144	0.001	0.241	1.013
<b>TC1-3-3 Drive to achieve</b> Once I set a goal, I am motivated to work until I have attained it. Qn32	0.758	0.26	8.512	0.004	0.249	1.268

A total of six trait and competency questions correlated positively with movement catalyzing, with each of them belonging to a different trait and competency construct. Four trait and competency questions correlated negatively with movement catalyzing, with two of them belonging to the construct “Drive to achieve.”

The individual trait and competency question with the strongest positive correlation with movement catalyzing was “TC3-4-4 *I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others.*” This question is part of the trait and competency construct “*Influencing Beliefs*,” which is defined as the transformational competence to influence others toward certain ideals, a process that shapes beliefs and transfers values.

It is possible that this competence functions like a keystone competence among all competencies of an effective catalyst, and that its proficient practice is at the very heart of movement ministry. This finding, although not entirely surprising, provides significant insights. For one, the foremost school of leadership, Transformational Leadership, has empirically identified “*Influencing Beliefs*” as one of only four competencies of transformational leaders. Also, from a movement philosophy standpoint, the effective transference of spiritual beliefs and values is at the core of movements, leading to multiplication of disciples and churches. For catalysts to often communicate their most important values and beliefs appears to have been identified as the single most impactful practice toward a movement.

## Summary and Conclusions

The research identified twenty-two traits and competencies that characterize effective movement catalysts and distinguish them from pioneers who have not catalyzed movements. Fifteen of these mark an even greater contrast between the two groups, with higher ratings for each trait and competency.

The catalysts who were interviewed in addition to completing the online survey referred to their intentionality and focus as an essential factor contributing to movement breakthrough. The non-catalysts didn’t mention either intentionality or focus at all – a significant contrast between the two groups.

The study also identified a number of specific cognitive and affective dispositions and behaviors that characterize effective catalysts and distinguish them from non-catalysts. These can be labeled Best Practices.

A total of six traits and competencies correlated positively with movement catalyzing in the regression analysis (Table 5). Below, these are combined with the findings of the descriptive statistics and the analysis of contributing and impeding (or internal/external) factors.

The following explanatory variables (traits and competencies, and contributing or impeding factors) were highly rated by catalysts (at least 4.5 of 5) and were shown in the regression analysis to have a significant influence on movement outcomes:

- **Influencing Beliefs** TC3-4-4 I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others (positive correlation).
- **Drive to Achieve** TC1-3-4 Setting and achieving goals motivates me (positive correlation).
- **Confidence in the Bible** TC2-8-1 Others would describe me as someone who has a deep confidence in the power of the Bible for discipling and ministry (positive correlation).
- **Fervent Intercession** TC2-5-5 On average, I spend this many hours per week praying by myself or with others on behalf of our adopted people (positive correlation).
- **Evangelistic Zeal** TC2-3-3 I regularly think about more effective ways we can share the Gospel (positive correlation).
- **Drive to Achieve** TC1-3-3 Once I set a goal, I am motivated to work until I have attained it (negative correlation).
- Raised up leaders effectively (contributing / internal)
- Right ministry strategy or method (contributing / internal)

The following explanatory variables (traits and competencies and contributing or impeding factors) were rated relatively highly by catalysts (higher than 4 on a 1-5 Likert scale) and were shown in the regression analysis to have significant influence on movement outcomes:

- **Persistence** TC1-6-5 I tend to stop trying when things get very hard. Qn50 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I don't give up, even when things get hard (positive correlation)
- **Listening to God** TC2-2-4 I am too busy with other things to wait on God and listen to Him. Qn51 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I regularly wait on God and listen to him. (negative correlation)
- **Drive to Achieve** TC1-3-1 Others would describe me as an achievement-oriented person (negative correlation)
- Discovery approach and discovery groups (contributing / internal)

Taken together, these two lists provide strong confirmation that a significant number of universally identified leader traits and competencies are also significant in the context of movement ministry.

The second important finding is that seven of the eight explanatory variables influencing movement outcomes and most highly rated by effective catalysts correlate positively with movement outcomes. The first among them was regular communication of one's most important values and beliefs, a competence so strategic that it may serve as a keystone in movement breakthrough. It is possible that this competence functions like a keystone competence among all competencies of an effective catalyst, and that its proficient practice is the single most impactful practice toward a movement.

This means that pioneers should focus more on developing positive traits and competencies within themselves and their teams, rather than being concerned about external impeding factors beyond their influence. A positive focus on developing strategic traits and competencies is much more likely to lead to successful movement outcomes. The list of traits and competencies presented here as characterizing effective catalysts gives mission trainers a blueprint for their training curricula and points mentors to the areas on which to base their mentoring. By focusing on these traits and competencies in trainees and mentees they can more effectively develop fruitful movement catalysts for the kingdom.

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