

# Counter-Narrating Mission: Mission Behavior as an Exchange Relation

Chris Robinson, Covenant College, Georgia

## Abstract

Like most actors, “mission actors” are exchange-seeking individuals. The position a mission actor holds within any particular mission structure determines the power the mission actor possesses. Generally, high power mission actors will benefit more than low power mission actors when sanctions are administered in a mission exchange. The present study elaborates how Elementary Theory models these exchange relations between social actors. Though not generally considered, exchange relations exist in mission structures. Hence, Elementary Theory can model and clarify relations in mission groups. The findings of this study include an explanation of how the administration and reception of sanctions determine the power in a given social and mission relation. The primary data utilized here comes from a zero-positive sanction exchange modeled by Project 52, a mission based in North Georgia that helps families and individuals with limited resources clean up their property and avoid eviction.

**Keywords:** Mission; mission behavior; mission power; mission structure; mission exchange; zero-positive sanction

## Introduction

In August 2011, Project 52 (a non-profit, 501c3 Christian ministry) completed its first act of service in the Chattanooga, Tennessee/North Georgia region. Project 52 (hereafter, P52) collected clothes for Signal Mountain Social Services of Signal Mountain, TN. One medium size box with approximately 25 items inside was slid through the donation slot without fanfare or massive celebration. Since that first project, P52 has completed in excess of 572 projects (the ministry’s goal is to complete one project each week for every calendar year), a minimum of 52 projects each year since 2011, by serving marginalized persons such as widows and families

who live at or below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Projects included yard work, house painting, food collection, trash removal, tornado relief, house cleaning, minor home repairs, and food delivery. Sometimes there is a personal connection with a client, though it is not required. P52's mission inspiration is from Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" The mission statement of P52 is "to glorify the Lord through service." In addition to simply helping people, P52 hopes to counter-narrate the dominant, contemporary model of mission. Merriam-Webster (2022) defines a counter-narrative as "an alternative or contradictory narrative." According to Bill Davis (2022), to counter-narrate something means to "tell a different story" about it. P52 wants to tell, and in fact live out, a different story about mission.

P52's mission model framework crafts an alternative and sometimes contradictory model of mission that counter-narrates several other current models of mission. The following excursus begins with a discussion of Elementary Theory (Willer and Anderson 1981; Willer et al. 2014) as a theoretical perspective that explains how power is exercised in an exchange relation<sup>2</sup> when agreement is reached. The objective is to understand better how power is exercised in a mission exchange relation when agreement is reached.<sup>3</sup> From a practical standpoint, this article will discuss the mission of P52 and how P52 participates in an exchange relation that is missional<sup>4</sup> in character. Initially, several ways of understanding the conceptual framework of Elementary Theory (hereafter, ET) are offered, and subsequently, relevant concepts will help the reader appreciate the unique approach taken by P52. Ultimately, P52 hopes to participate in a mission relation that administers mission sanctions in a zero-positive mission exchange relation (explained below) that ultimately puts P52 in a powerless position. This is perhaps the key distinctive characterizing the P52 approach—the ministry self-consciously endeavors to gain precisely nothing from their activities, and to teach mission participants to "give without getting."

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Federal Register (2022), the current poverty rate for a family of four is income of \$27,750 per year.

<sup>2</sup>Elementary Theory (Willer and Anderson 1981; Willer et al. 2014) explores social relations in coercive relations as well. For the purposes of this article, only exchange relations are addressed. Coercive relations in mission relations will be addressed in future works.

<sup>4</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright defines missional as "something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes or dynamics of mission" (2006:24). For Bryan Stone, missional is "God's mission in the world, a mission in which the church is an instrument and agent, and so exists for the world rather than for itself" (2007:189).

## Theoretical Perspective

To begin, there are many features ET can offer for a better understanding of mission behavior<sup>5</sup>. However, for the purposes of this study, P52 adopts four important features from ET: 1) a modeling procedure, 2) an explanation of rational choice, 3) a definition of power, and 4) a conceptual framework for an exchange relation. Each of these features of ET's theoretical framework is applied to mission behavior in general, and to P52<sup>6</sup> in particular.

### *Feature 1: Mission Actors Model and Create Mission Behavior*

The first feature P52 adopts from ET is a modeling procedure. In other words, ET builds models of social behavior. ET is "a 'modeling procedure' that is used to build models for properties inside an actor like preferences and beliefs, and for properties outside the actor, like social relations and social structures" (Willer and Anderson 1981:225). ET offers two types of models, one internal to a social actor and a second external to the actor. The internal model is concerned with the construction of properties (characteristics or traits within a social actor) regarding an actor's preferences (what an actor likes more than something else) and an actor's beliefs (what an actor trusts in, has confidence in, or has faith in). The external model addresses the construction of properties with regard to a social actor's social relations (the connection one social actor has to another social actor) and social structures (the connection a social actor has to an institution or group). These two models combine to predict a social actor's behavior in any given relationship or society at any given time. A comprehensive social model will account for both the internal and external characteristics that explain a social actor's behavior.

Likewise, ET can build a mission model or procedure for the properties that "internally" comprise an actor's mission preferences and mission beliefs. Furthermore, ET can model a procedure for the properties that are external to a mission actor pertaining to an actor's mission relations and the mission structure<sup>7</sup>—the mission field<sup>8</sup>. These two factors specified in the model combine to determine a mission actor's behavior in any given mission relationship at any given time.

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<sup>5</sup> Mission behavior is the act of mission each mission actor performs within a mission field.

<sup>6</sup> Future articles will unfold other features adapted from ET to P52.

<sup>7</sup> A mission structure is a complex system of interrelated mission actors working together as an aggregate. A mission structure often includes three actors: the sender, the messenger, and the receiver. Consequently, each mission actor has a role to play within the mission system. Each mission actor exhibits a particular mission behavior that identifies the unique function each mission actor performs within the mission system, and each mission actor occupies a position within the mission structure.

<sup>8</sup> A mission field is the arena in which mission is performed.

*Feature 2: Mission Actors are Self-Seeking*

The second feature ET offers to understand mission behavior is embodied in its first principle: “All social actors act to maximize their payoffs” (Willer et al. 2014:184). This principle suggests that all social actors are rational and obtain their values from the social structure in which they act. Consequently, they maximize their profit based on the values given by, or inherent in, the social structure. Hence, profit varies in kind from one structure to another, and consequently, rationality is relative to context. Schelling (1970:86) states that “each player’s best choice of action depends on the action he expects the other to take.” Therefore, “strategic rationality is the default assumption of Elementary Theory” (Willer et al. 2014:184). A central tenet of this mode of rational action is that social actors base their actions on their expectation of the other actors in their orbits.

This same type of rational action characterizes actors in a mission exchange relation; mission actors are also typically self-seeking and strategic individuals. Each mission actor desires to maximize his or her payoff in any mission exchange, with payoffs varying based on the mission structure and individual mission actor’s preferences and beliefs. As rationalists, mission actors obtain their values from the mission structure in which they act. In other words, mission actors desire a payoff from their mission exchanges. Obviously, the payoff differs from one mission actor to another. Further, mission actors act based on what they expect the people in their mission structure will do, and normative expectations condition the kinds of rewards they seek and expect to receive.

*Feature 3: Mission Actors Exercise Power*

The third ET feature that helps explain mission behavior is power. “Power structures make those high in power obstinate and those low in power obedient” (Willer et al. 2014:178). Furthermore, “power structures connect social relations in such a way that high-power actors face little or no loss upon disagreeing with those in low power, while, in the same process, the opportunities for better agreements for those low in power shrink to nothing” (Willer et al. 2014:178-179). Exchange ratios, then, benefit actors in high power positions.

In mission structures, actors with high power are also frequently obstinate while mission actors low in power are obedient. Those in high power positions face little risk as compared to actors in low power positions where opportunities for exchange alternatives are limited. For example, exchange ratios generally benefit actors in high power positions. In mission exchanges, missionaries are mission actors who are high in power and in a position to administer sanctions (discussed below) to low power actors, such as someone needing the material benefit of a cup of water [material sanction] or the spiritual benefit of salvation [non-material sanction]). The sanctions the powerful missionary possesses are more consequential

than the sanctions possessed by the mission actor in need. Nonetheless, both actors generally aspire to reach an agreement in a mission exchange.

#### *Feature 4: Mission Actors Administer Sanctions*

The fourth feature of ET that helps explain mission behavior takes the form of a conceptual framework superimposed over a social actor. In what follows, several concepts within this framework will be explicated and developed, beginning with an examination of a social actor, social acts and action, and the notion of sanctions. These concepts will be identified in the P52 mission model as well. According to Willer and Anderson (1981), a *social actor* is defined by two properties attributed to the social actor: the *property of meaning* and the *property of resources*.

#### Property of Meaning

The *property of meaning* involves a social actor and three additional properties: *preferences, beliefs, and decision procedures* (Willer and Anderson 1981). Each of these properties will be explained in turn.

For a social actor, “*preferences* are one of three properties of the meaning system attributed to a social actor consisting of a weak ordering from most to least valued of the system states believed by that actor to be potential to a given action system in relation to the actor’s position in that system” (Willer and Anderson 1981:225). A social actor’s preferences are connected—derived from—a meaning system. And meaning systems vary from one actor to the next. For example, one social actor may prefer Democrats over Republicans, Methodists over Presbyterians, or the Yankees over the Red Sox. Meaning systems have significance—they offer legitimacy and wield authority over the social actor. They also offer depth and breadth to a social actor’s preferences. Within any given meaning system, a social actor creates a hierarchy of preferences (ranging from highly valued to not valued) which will then direct an actor’s behavior choices within the meaning system (or structure).

Mission preferences are developed in the same manner. For a mission actor, mission preferences are one of three properties of the mission meaning system that are attributed to a mission actor. These consist of a weak ordering from most to least valued of the system states valued by that mission actor, given his or her position in that system. A mission actor’s preferences are connected to a mission meaning system.

The second property of meaning is a social actor’s *beliefs*, which are “one of the three properties of meaning system of a social actor which are statements concerned with the

information that an actor has which are relevant to its action system at a given point in time” (Willer and Anderson 1981:225). Beliefs were discussed above in Feature #1 as well.

A mission actor’s beliefs are one of the three properties of the mission meaning system. These include statements concerned with the information that a mission actor has which are relevant to its mission action system at a given point in time. An evangelist who gives a sermon “declaring the truth of the gospel” to someone who converts is expressing a belief. The evangelist believes in the message.

The third property of meaning involves a social actor’s *decision procedures*, “which are the means through which an actor selects its contingency rules and its action in light of its preferences, beliefs, and the structure of the system” (Willer and Anderson 1981:225). Decision procedures include the norms, standards, rules, and boundaries a social actor employs while carrying out an exchange with another social actor. Often the actor will consider her or his expectations about an exchange and also the consequences of an exchange. Alternative exchange relations may be explored as well. In sum, the social actor ponders whether to exchange with another while evaluating the rules governing the situation as he or she considers the preferences, beliefs, and social structure connected to the exchange relation.

A mission actor’s decision procedures are one of the three properties of the mission meaning system attributed to a mission actor. These are means by which the actor selects contingency rules and modes of action in light of his or her mission preferences, beliefs, and the structure of the mission system. An evangelist makes the decision to embrace various norms governing what it *means* for an evangelist to communicate the Gospel to a potential convert, and acts accordingly (preaching a message of salvation, preaching in a tent of meeting, preaching “hell fire and brimstone,” among other options). An evangelist will consider various contingency rules connected to her or his preferences, beliefs, and the mission structure.

#### Property of Resources

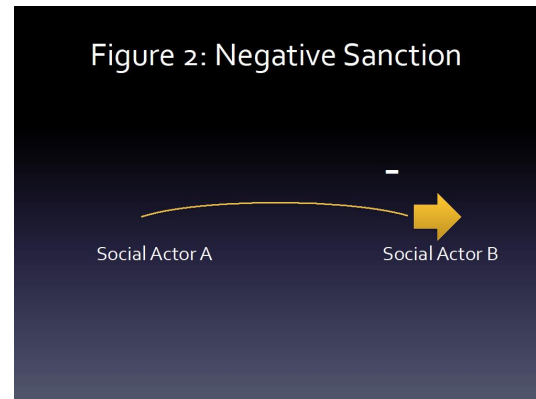
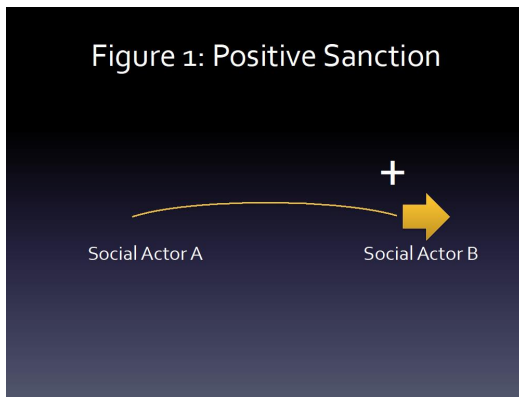
The second property attributed to a social actor is the property of resources. Two types of resources make up this property for a social actor: *material resources* and *symbolic resources*.

First, *material resources* are “the physical things held by an actor that may be used and/or consumed on the one hand or transmitted to other actors on the other” (Willer and Anderson 1981:226). A material resource for a social actor could be money, a poker chip, or a candy bar. Thus, mission material resources are the physical things held by a mission actor that may be used and/or consumed, or transmitted to other actors.

The second type of resource are “*symbolic resources* that may be transmitted by an actor that are the elements of that actor’s beliefs” (Willer and Anderson 1981:226). A symbolic resource could be patriotism, loyalty, or integrity. The mission symbolic resource would be any symbolic resource that may be transmitted by a mission actor that references the elements of the mission actor’s beliefs. A symbolic resource for a mission actor could be salvation, forgiveness, or love.

### Social Action & Social Acts & Sanctions

A *social action* “is an action conditioned by an actor’s preferences and by its beliefs concerning at least one element of at least one other actor’s meaning system” (Willer and Anderson 1981:226). Here, a social actor reflects on his or her own preferences and beliefs, and based on this reflection seeks an exchange with another who has the same preferences or beliefs. Obviously, in order to make an exchange, actors must act. “*Social acts* are sanction flows, communication and information flows that can or do occur within social relationships” (Willer and Anderson 1981:226). To complete a social act, social actors administer *sanctions* to one another. *Sanctions* are the building blocks that link actors and social structures and are “connected to generate preferences, beliefs and relations” (Willer and Anderson 1981:225). Sanctions are defined as a “social action transmitted by one actor and received by another, which alters the ‘aero’ of the actor receiving the sanction” (Willer 1999:24). The key to an exchange when administering a sanction is to alter one’s own preference state as well as another actor’s preference state. In lay terms, “preference state” refers to something desired by a social actor. For example, if James desires a hamburger and George sets one before him and he consumes it, his preference state is altered, because the original impulse (desire for a burger) has been met. One’s preference state can be altered either positively or negatively. A *positive sanction* (Figure 1) is “a social action that increases the preference state of the actor receiving the sanction flow” (Willer and Anderson 1981:226). A *negative sanction* (Figure 2) is “a social act that reduces the preference state of the actor receiving the sanction flow” (Willer and Anderson 1981:226). Furthermore, there are two ways to *increase* the preference state of any actor: “(1) transmit a positive sanction to the actor or (2) terminate the transmission of a negative sanction” (Willer 1999:25). In addition, there are two ways to *decrease* the preference state of any actor: “(1) transmit a negative sanction to the actor, or (2) terminate the transmission of a positive sanction” (Willer 1999:25).



A *mission action* is an action conditioned by a mission actor's preferences and beliefs concerning at least one element of another actor's mission meaning system. A mission actor reflects on his or her own preferences and beliefs and, based on this reflection, seeks to make an exchange with another mission actor with the same preferences or beliefs. Sociologically speaking, once the beliefs and preferences connect to the meaning system of each mission actor, then mission sanctions will begin to flow. Spiritually speaking, it is an act of the Holy Spirit that solidifies this connection as the Holy Spirit is the agent of conversion. This is a mission act, which is a mission sanction flow such as information or communications that occurs within mission relationships. To complete the mission act, mission actors administer mission sanctions to one another, which will alter the preference state of each mission actor in a mission exchange. Each mission actor is seeking to alter their own preference state either positively (the mission action increases the preference state of a mission actor) or negatively (the mission action reduces the preference state of a mission actor). The two ways a mission actor can increase the preference state of another mission actor are to transmit a positive sanction or to terminate a negative sanction. The two ways a mission actor can decrease the preference state of another mission actor are to transmit a negative sanction or to terminate a positive sanction.

In addition to the basic sanctions that are either positive or negative as discussed above, ET outlines eight additional subtypes of sanctions that affect the preference state of both the transmitter and receiver of a sanction (Willer and Anderson 1981).<sup>9</sup> Of particular interest to P52 is a *zero-positive* subtype of sanction that affects the preference state of the *receiver only* and does not affect the preference state of the transmitter (Willer and Anderson 1981). "Zero-positive sanction" is a technical term describing an exchange relation where the "sender" administers a sanction to the "receiver" but this act is not reciprocated. In other words, the

<sup>9</sup>Sanction subtypes that affect the preference state of both the transmitter and the receiver of a sanction include a *negative-positive sanction*, a *positive-positive sanction*, a *negative-negative sanction*, and a *positive-negative sanction*. Sanction subtypes that affect the preference state of the receiver only include a *zero-positive sanction* and a *zero-negative sanction*. Sanction subtypes that affect the preference state of the transmitter only include a *negative-zero sanction* and a *positive-zero sanction* (Willer and Anderson 1981).



preference state of the transmitter is unaltered, while the preference state of the receiver is altered in a positive direction. This type of sanction mimics the altruism ideal when one social actor is willing to exchange with another social actor without receiving anything in return.

## The Ten Principles of Project 52

Now that the terminology for a mission exchange has been established, the mission model of Project 52 will be explained through the lens of the sociological perspective of Elementary Theory and shown to be a practical, viable model of mission. The ten principles of P52's mission model counter-narrate mission in a fresh and new manner. To suggest that missions must be counter-narrated has great potential to cause offense among those who have carefully crafted missions theory, worked as missionaries, or even supported missionaries. However, it would be short-sighted for any mission organization or missionary to believe they had rooted out all self-interest and personal gain. To suggest this would be to suggest that their approach to mission had somehow risen above the sinfulness that affects all of creation—both its structures and human beings. Accordingly, the approach proposed here hopefully offers a new way of looking at missions, and concomitantly, new opportunities for self-examination, humility, and repentance at both the individual and structural/organizational level. At the very least, P52 offers insight into just how much economic and other approaches that measure success in terms of filling up, not pouring out, have dominated our legitimation system. The model will define various aspects of a mission actor and the mission roles each actor in a given mission structure will assume. Finally, the model will identify the mission sanction that each mission actor will administer in a mission exchange. Most notably, the mission sanction subtype *zero-positive* is P52's best choice of mission sanction exchange. The ten principles are as follows:

*Principle 1: To glorify God in all mission endeavors.*

Principle 1 captures the mission goal of Project 52. P52 adheres to the belief that if the chief end of any mission endeavor is to glorify the Lord, then P52 cannot fail. Of course, there have been and will be shortcomings and failures in the actual act of mission. Yet, if the focus of the mission act is glory to the Lord first, then the remaining nine principles follow in proper sequence.

Scripture exhorts humankind to worship the Lord.<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Kittel, when defining the Hebrew word for “glory,” states that glory is “that which makes God impressive to man, the force of his self-manifestation” (1964:238). In addition, Kittel reflects on the Greek word *δοξα*

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 96:4-9; Isaiah 25:1; 1 Corinthians 10:31

(glory), stating that glory “expresses the divine mode of being’ (1964:247). In this manner, the one glorifying the Lord expresses divine honor, splendor, power, and a visible divine radiance.

Mission actors are image bearers of God the creator, and as such reflect the glory of God. Furthermore, they are commanded to fill the earth with the glory of God. Hence, when P52 mission actors serve with mission acts, they act to glorify God first. P52’s chief end is to glorify God in every aspect of its mission; P52 is created for the glory of the Lord. When P52 serves others as image bearers of God, it fills the earth with the glory of the Lord.

P52 has the privilege to work with local county code officers who, by law, must issue citations to homeowners with property that is out of compliance with local city and county statutes (see principle 7 below). For example, a property with excessive trash and debris scattered about the lawn may be considered out of compliance with county codes. One of the callings of P52 is to complete the mission act of cleaning up the lawn, and therein lies some spiritual irony. P52 glorifies God with humanity’s trash. What is deemed refuse for humanity can be handled for God’s glory, as a client’s trash (with all of its stench and grotesqueness) reveals God’s treasure. God can use a client’s garbage to bring about his glory as mission actors work as his hands and feet in the community. In effect, P52, acting as God’s agents, transforms “one man’s trash” into spiritual treasure, in the sense that the temporal problem of accumulated garbage and decay is eliminated from a client’s yard and transformed into an act of worship and fellowship. You can’t spin straw into gold, but, it turns out, you can transform garbage into worship.

Drawing on Elementary Theory discussed above, the mission actors in the mission exchange are God and the servants of P52. A *zero-positive* mission sanction subtype emerges as mission actors administer the sanction of “glory” asking nothing in return. In other words, God’s glory is magnified (though theologically problematic, in the language of elementary theory, the “preference state” of God is altered as he receives glory) through the labor of the mission actor who pours out service, yet the mission actor who offers this service seeks no return sanction from God. Hence the preference state of the mission actor who is serving goes unaltered. The act of mission that glorifies the Lord is for God’s glory and His glory only.<sup>11</sup>

### *Principle 2: To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ*

The second principle of P52 is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those with whom P52 connects. These include clients, volunteers, community members, government officials,

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<sup>11</sup> A case could be made that the mission actor in this example receives less than nothing in return, because they leave the mission activity dirty and encumbered by trash they didn’t have before beginning their work.

and strangers. As Jesus states in John 20:21, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”<sup>12</sup> Just as Jesus is sent by the Father, P52 is sent<sup>13</sup> by Christ to present the gospel in the form of love, service, comfort (see principle 3 below), and Jesus’ message of salvation when clients are nonbelievers, offering peace and hope in times of stress and disquiet.

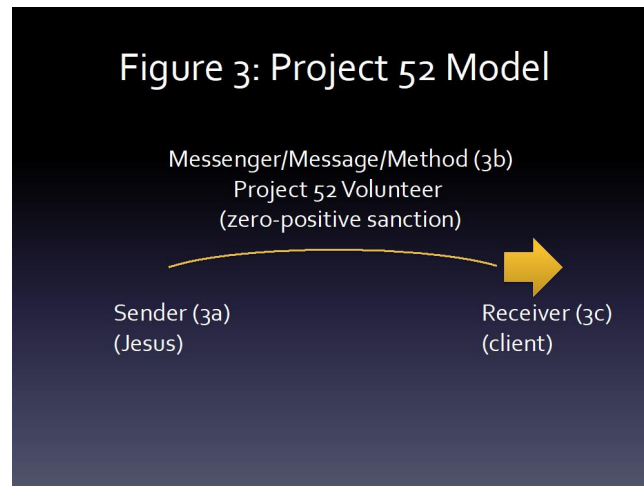
P52 is sent out into the world to do the things of Jesus. Here, the basic model of P52 takes shape as three mission actors are identified in a mission exchange (Figure 3). Mission actor one is Jesus, the sender (Figure 3a.). Mission actor two is the P52 volunteer, the messenger (Figure 3b). Mission actor three is the client, the receiver (Figure 3c.). Jesus (sender) dispatches P52 (messenger) into the world with the gospel (the message) via a service (the method) to those who might listen (receivers).

P52 is the messenger (3b), accepting the role as the positive sanction administered by Jesus to the client. The positive sanction takes on a threefold character of messenger, message, and method. More specifically, the messengers are the volunteers who serve on projects with P52 who carry with them the gospel of Jesus. The method the messengers choose to employ varies depending on the project type. For example, a P52 messenger gathers and delivers clothing and food (method) to a client who is naked and hungry. Or, a P52 messenger paints a house (method) for a client whose house needs painting. Hence, the function of Jesus the sender is to alter the preference state of the receivers. Again, the function of the receiver (the client) is not to alter the preference state of the sender (Jesus), because the gospel of Jesus is a free gift of grace and Jesus expects nothing in return. Nor is the client (receiver) responsible to alter the preference state of the messenger. The messenger is simply the conduit by which the message is sent. Thus, the mission posture of a P52 messenger is not to seek to alter his or her preference state, but rather, to alter the preference state of the client, expecting nothing in return. The subtype *zero-positive* sanction illustrates this mission exchange.

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<sup>12</sup> Some additional verses reflecting the call to share the Gospel are Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8; 2:39; 2:41; Romans 10:12-15.

<sup>13</sup> Πέμπω means “to send forth” (Kittel 1983:398) and often “to characterize the sending as a mission” (Kittel 1983:405).



So, who are the receivers (3c)? The receivers are those who witness the message of Jesus through the intermediary actions of the P52 messengers. First (and most importantly), P52 shares the gospel of Jesus Christ with the client, who is the initial contact and primary receiver, and exhibits a spiritual, physical, or emotional need; the client demonstrates the manifest function in the mission act. When the need is satisfied, the receiver's preference state is altered. As stated, whether the need is material, such as clothing, food, or paint, or symbolic, such as prayer or pastoral care, the needs of the client are met.

Second, there are other mission actors whose preference states can be altered in the mission act. An unbelieving and unsuspecting volunteer can have his or her preference state altered when he or she witnesses the gospel in action. P52 takes seriously the fact that not all volunteers are necessarily believers in Christ; assuming the salvation of volunteers would be naïve. The community that exists in and around the client will also see the gospel with the hope of altering their preference state. For example, one of the services P52 provides is to remove trash and debris from a client's property because it violates the code of the city or county and is subject to citation or fine (see Principle 7 below). The director of P52 is often asked, "Why doesn't P52 hire an excavator to load the dumpster with a client's debris and trash? The process would go much faster." P52's response is first that it only takes around 2 to 2½ hours for a team of 20 volunteers to load a 30-yard dumpster. Second, P52 uses free human strength versus the cost of a machine. And third, and most importantly, an army of 20 to 100 volunteers serve on a single property and, by their physical presence, share the gospel in a very loud and significant manner to the neighbors in the community who are watching. This community also includes government officials such as code officers, police officers, and county commissioners who also have their preference state altered by watching and participating with the service P52 provides.

*Principle 3: Ease the suffering of the client.*

The third principle of P52 is to ease the suffering of the client. Over the first decade of serving, P52 reduced many and various adversities of numerous clients. Some sufferings are lessened by tangible acts of labor like painting a house, performing yardwork, cleaning a house, loading a dumpster with trash and debris from a client's yard or house, providing food or clothing, or completing other odd jobs around a client's home. Other sufferings are diminished by intangible acts like prayer, conversation, and reading scripture to a client. The Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God." P52 adheres to the belief that as God comforts humanity, humanity in turn ought to comfort neighbors. The prophet Isaiah declares (61:1-2), "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn." C.S. Lewis affirms this sentiment stating, "Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object to your senses" (1977:198). Mission actor 1, the servant, administers the positive sanction of comfort and the positive sanction of physical labor to alter the preference state of mission actor 2, the client. When P52 provides comfort to a client, it actively seeks nothing in return from the client, a *zero-positive* mission sanction.

*Principle 4: Create community*

The fourth principle of P52 is the call to create community. "So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes" (Bonhoeffer 1954:17). P52 desires to be in "the thick of foes" and not sequestered away from humanity in need. Creating community unfolds in four ways: community is created with God, with fellow believers (volunteers), with the client, and with the neighborhood/community/county/town being served. First, God desires to have community with his creation. 1 Peter 2:9-10 states, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Here community with God unfolds by belonging to God and by being a people of God as result of his sanction of mercy. "Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients" (Bonhoeffer 1954:28). Furthermore, "Christian community is like the Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which

we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship, or our sanctification” (Bonhoeffer 1954:30). “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ” (Bonhoeffer 1954:21). P52 desires to have community with God via service, as echoed by Principle 1—when P52 glorifies the community through service, community with God is created.

Second, P52 establishes community with a reservoir of volunteers, many of whom identify as Christian (discussed further in Principle 6 below) through the service they provide to the client. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, “So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians” (1954:18). Being in the mere and tangible presence of other believers is an encouragement to the Christian until the time that Christ returns again. “The believer feels no shame, as though he were still living too much in the flesh, when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians” (Bonhoeffer 1954:19). Psalm 133:1 declares, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!”

Third, P52 creates community with the client. “And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community. Their fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and this ‘alien righteousness’” (Bonhoeffer 1954:23). Furthermore, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer” (Bonhoeffer 1954:19). With each project, P52 creates this type of community with each client served.

Fourth, community is launched with the surrounding town and county. People who are on the periphery peering into the work of the volunteers of P52 witness the impact of the service of P52. A neighborhood is cleaned up, fellowship is inaugurated, connectedness occurs, and the love of Christ is shared. Moreover, mission exchanges transpire between the P52 volunteer mission actors and the non-partisan mission actors of the immediate town and county who observe the activities. A *zero-positive sanction* exchange occurs as the preference state of the town and county mission actor is altered (a cleaner community) and the P52 volunteer’s preference state is unaltered because often, in this case, the P52 mission actor does not even know that he or she is in an exchange relation because the bystander is invisible.

*Principle 5: Complete 52 projects in a single calendar year (Missiometrics<sup>14</sup>)*

The fifth principle of P52 is the goal of completing 52 projects each calendar year—one project every week. P52's theme verse, ironically (and with no meaning intended), derives from Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news." Its brief history is that a small group of people met on Signal Mountain in Tennessee in July 2011 desiring to see mission work executed locally and regularly, and P52 became an official 501c3 non-profit ministry in February 2012 in the state of Tennessee. Its mission was to be fluid, consistent, and always moving. Since its inception, at least 52 projects have been completed each year. At a moment's notice, the reservoir (Principle 6 below) of volunteers is ready to serve. P52 primarily serves widows, families living at or below the poverty line, other non-profit organizations, or those who find themselves in a crisis.

*Principle 6: Create a reservoir of volunteers*

The sixth principle of P52 is to create a reservoir of volunteers to serve when called upon. Matthew 23:11 states, "The greatest among you will be your servant."<sup>15</sup> P52 possesses a base of volunteer servants who are willing to serve whenever a project arises, and to complete one project per week for the 52 weeks of the year, many volunteers are needed. Hence, P52 amassed a "reservoir" of volunteers who are willing to serve at various times throughout the year. Can a volunteer serve every week? "Yes, but not likely." Does a volunteer possess the skill set to perform every possible type of project? "No." Simply stated, because of the volume of volunteers in the reservoir and the vast and various skills each volunteer possesses, there are always a cadre of volunteers who can provide labor and skill for each weekly project.

Anecdotally, P52 is often asked by some volunteers, "why doesn't P52 rent a bulldozer to move the debris into a dumpster." The reason is the reservoir; a team of 15 to 100 volunteers becomes a human bulldozer. In addition, the community being served witnesses an army of volunteers glorifying the Lord, serving Jesus Christ, and providing relief to a client. The manner in which the task is completed is greater than the efficiency of the task. In Matthew 17:20 Jesus states, "... Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." The mountain that is moved is a mountain of debris taken from a client's yard to a landfill. In 2021, the human reservoir of P52 moved 128.69 tons of

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<sup>14</sup> "Missiometrics *applies scientific method* to the phenomena of missions, studying them in ways that are *empirical, quantitative, and material*. Missiometrics measures anything and everything in any way relevant to world mission and global evangelization...collecting mission data" (David Barrett 2000:636).

<sup>15</sup> Other verses pertaining to the being in service for the Lord are Hebrews 6:10; Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 6:10.

debris. From 2017 to 2020, the human reservoir of P52 (a total of 3060 volunteers) moved 354.66 tons (709,320 pounds) of debris at a cost of \$33,405 (cost of dumpster rental and debris disposal). The faith of many Christians moved mountains for the Lord.

*Principle 7: Work with local code enforcement officers of municipalities and counties*

Principle 7 of P52 is to work closely with government officials to accomplish kingdom work for the Lord.

Anecdotally, P52 partners with local county code officers in an attempt to glorify the Lord, share the Gospel, and reach out to people in need. For example, Mrs. Jones' (not her real name; a widow living at the poverty line) yard was in violation of a county ordinance due to the accumulated trash in her yard. She stated that due to the cost of medical bills and pharmaceuticals for an illness, she could not afford to pay for trash removal from her home. Neighbors began to complain and ultimately the neighbors contacted county code officials to investigate the situation. Code officers arrived at Mrs. Jones' house and found her in violation of the International Property Maintenance Code (2012).<sup>16</sup> As a result, Mrs. Jones was threatened with a fine (county statutes differ but fines can range from \$10 to \$1000 a day depending on the county code officer's assessment) and potential court appearance (including court costs) unless she cleaned up her yard within a specified time. Mrs. Jones did not possess the funds to satisfy the fine, the court costs, nor the cost of cleaning up her yard. At this juncture, county code officers suggested that she partner with P52 to clean up her yard. She agreed and met simultaneously with the P52 director and the county code officer to establish a time when the P52 reservoir (P52 Principle 6) could clean up her yard. Within a week or so, Mrs. Jones' yard was cleared of debris at no cost to her. In addition, her property was back in compliance, the neighbors no longer complained, the county statutes were satisfied, the environment was salvaged, a relationship was established between Mrs. Jones and the reservoir (Mrs. Jones was invited to attend a local church where a reservoir volunteer was a member and further follow-up occurred with P52), and the Lord was glorified. Church (represented by the Christians in the reservoir) and state (represented by local county code officers) served hand in hand to glorify the Lord and share the love of Christ with someone in need.

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<sup>16</sup> IMPC (2012:15) "**308.1 Accumulation of rubbish or garbage.** All exterior property and premises, and the interior of every structure, shall be free from any accumulation of rubbish or garbage. **308.2 Disposal of rubbish.** Every occupant of a structure shall dispose of all rubbish in a clean and sanitary manner by placing such rubbish in approved containers."



*Principle 8: A non-profit ministry that maintains low overhead costs*

Principle 8 of P52 is that as a non-profit ministry, P52 believes that the money that is donated to P52 ought to have a direct influence on the clients that are served. In other words, P52 maintains very low overhead costs. As I Corinthians 4:1-2 states, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” P52 is called by God to serve, and God has entrusted many things into its hands.

*Principle 9: Clean up the environment*

Principle 9 of P52 is to do its best to clean up the physical environment. Jeremiah 2:7 states, “I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination.” Since the fall, humanity has defiled the earth that God gave to humanity. Is it possible for creation to return to the place of Eden? No. Only Jesus Christ can accomplish this task upon his return. However, P52 believes that in the meantime, humanity can make every effort to partially restore at least selective aspects of God’s creation.

*Principle 10: Stay below the radar...Cultivate a Zero-positive mission exchange relation...Be a Zephyr!<sup>17</sup>*

Principle 10 of P52 is to keep the ministry of P52 unpretentious by not drawing attention to the work that it performs. After glorifying the Lord, sharing the Gospel, and comforting a client, this is its most significant principle. As Philippians 2:5-8 states:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Jesus Christ “emptied himself” as he took on the “form of a slave.” In humility and to the best of its ability, P52 desires to follow this prototypical model of Christ established when serving others. Be nothing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, “Only when we have become completely oblivious of self are we ready to bear the cross of Christ” (1995:88). Further, Thomas a’ Kempis states, “This is the highest and most profitable lesson, truly to know and to despise ourselves. To have no opinion of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others, is great wisdom

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<sup>17</sup> A zephyr is a soft gentle breeze.

and perfection" (1886:6). P52 desires to be "oblivious of self" and "to have no opinion of oneself." Hopefully, the most P52 will be noticed is as a zephyr.

For P52, this is a significant and specific goal for each project. Sociologically, a *zero-positive* sanction exchange relation is demonstrated here. For example, mission actor #1 (a missionary) administers a sanction to mission actor #2 (a mission receiver). Mission actor #1 gives up something to mission actor #2 without expecting nor receiving anything in return. As a result of mission actor #1's sanction, mission actor #2 is rewarded. But the same does not exist for mission actor #1 as he or she neither expects nor receives anything in return. Hence, mission actor #1 receives no reward, nor wants one. The P52 missionary (mission actor #1) resembles a zephyr as he/she is a conduit for the Lord (Principle #1 and Principle #2) and not a conduit for self.

## Conclusion

This article elaborates the intersection of three significant items. Sociologically, Elementary Theory was incorporated to model and to explain the behavior of mission actors who are social actors, and how mission actors are rational as they weigh the costs and the benefits of doing mission. Elementary Theory also provided a model of mission when sanctions were administered in a *zero-positive* exchange relation. Practically, Project 52 adopts the theoretical premises of Elementary Theory, develops a model of mission, and implements the model in the world. One particular concern of Project 52 is to foster mission relations by administering sanctions utilizing a *zero-positive* mission exchange relation. In this way, Project 52 strives in all its mission endeavors to bequeath the glory to God and take on an obedient and unnoticed role in mission exchange, offering a counter-narration of mission. Future study will address issues of conflict, coercion, and confrontation that also exist in mission exchange relations.

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