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Follower-centric: An approach to leadership

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Abstract | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Literature Review | 7 |
| Definition, Connotation, and Stigma | 8 |
| Follower Identity | 12 |
| Drawing Correlations Between Followership and Leadership | 15 |
| Followership Styles, Principles, Skills, and Traits | 15 |
| Leadership Styles, Principles, Skills, and Traits | 18 |
| Framework for Analysis | 20 |
| Methodology | 22 |
| Analysis and Conclusion | 22 |
| References | 25 |

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To my family, friends, and professors who helped me on this long journey.

This is dedicated to Earleen, for her warmth, wisdom, strength, humor, and irreverence.

Abstract

Followership can be described as the silent partner to leadership. Leadership, by nature, eclipses followership leaving it largely in the shadows but, as organizations flatten, research on followership, in a professional setting, is expanding and serving as a framework for reflection upon leadership practices and effectiveness. The goal of this project is to examine followership as a contributor to the practice of leadership, to bring awareness to the significance of the relationship between followers and leaders, and to identify opportunities to improve leader and follower effectiveness. The study includes a definition and deconstruction of followership, a discussion of the evolutionary basis of the leader-follower relationship, the connotations and stigma associated with followers and leaders, and a review of the literature on followership, including work by Robert Kelley, who identified five follower types based on their levels of independent critical thinking and engagement with leadership. A survey was conducted to gather information about knowledge of and experience with followership, followership and leadership style preferences, and to identify potential opportunities for future research.

Keywords: followership, leadership, stigma, identity, role, effectiveness.

Follower-centric: An approach to effective leadership

Introduction

Leadership theory commonly positions followers as passive recipients rather than active contributors, and the follower experience remains largely untapped as a resource for leaders who are looking to be more effective. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the follower perspective, and to shed light on the significance of the leader-follower relationship as it relates to enhancing leadership effectiveness in a professional setting.

For the purpose of this study, the term *follower* is intended to reference a position of lower authority in a prescribed professional setting, such as an office or an organization. This is different from an elective setting where one chooses to follow in the modern context of social media, or based on religious or political beliefs, or to support the cause of a charismatic leader. For this study of followership, the reader may supplant the term *follower* with the term *subordinate* if it helps to understand the framework in which the study is being conducted, which is in a professional structured setting, as opposed to a social, religious or political setting. The English language offers few words to sufficiently describe a non-leader in a professional setting, other than *subordinate* or *team member* which is a significant limitation relevant to the study of followership. Acceptance of the term *follower*, as interchangeable with *subordinate*, must be assumed for the purposes of examining the leader-follower relationship in a professional context.

In a professional setting, there are usually more followers than leaders yet the idea that “followers are every bit as critical to the success of an organization as leaders” (Kelley, 1988, as cited by Gobble, 2017, p. 59) may be perceived as a threat to undermine the dominance of the leadership position. Leadership may even rely on the disempowerment of followers to perpetuate the status quo and to quell any perceived threat to their own position of power. In this way, a

further examination of the asymmetry of the traditional leader-follower relationship and the disadvantaged nature of the follower position is warranted.

“Leadership is not follower-free, and followership seldom means blind obedience. Leaders/followers can be linked to or different from formal positions; they can be more or less salient or camouflaged and change over time, but they are still characterized by a clear sense of asymmetry, specifically a difference in status, identity, and power” (DeRue & Ashford, 2010, as cited by Alvesson & Blom, 2015).

Analysis includes a review of the literature, a definition of followership and associated stigma and connotations, the role of identity, an investigation into the follower styles identified by Kelley and how they connect with leadership styles, with the goal of contributing to the literature about how leaders can improve their effectiveness in the eyes of followers.

Much of the literature emphasizes that leaders and followers have a lot in common. “Since followership occurs in the same space with leadership, an attempt to explore followership is, in essence, an attempt to explore leadership” (Crossman & Crossman, 2011; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2009, as cited by Alegbeleye & Kaufman, p. 37). Leaders and followers not only occupy the same space, but they are often the same people serving in multiple roles throughout their day, particularly those in middle-management (Kelley, 1988, 1992, as cited by Gatti et al, p. 271). Connected with this idea is the recurring theme in the literature that “Self-leadership is also the essence of effective followership” (Manz & Sims, 1991) which is a sentiment that is echoed by Kelley, Kellerman, and Chaleff, leading scholars on the topic.

However, “The singular focus on leadership would be sensible if followership was innate or of minimal value” (Hurwitz & Koonce, p. 43). While the study of leadership inherently

includes the people they lead, less attention has been focused on studying followership as it inherently includes the people they follow. The latter represents the view this paper attempts to uncover to reveal a more follower-centric view of leadership through a deconstruction of followership based on Robert Kelley's followership matrix (1988), and an examination of the asymmetrical relationship between followers and leaders from the follower point of view.

Literature Review

A study of followership reveals a complex relationship between leaders and followers. Historically, the contribution of leaders held precedence but today "followers are increasingly vital, in part because organizational structures are flattening and it may be more difficult, at any given moment, to distinguish leaders from followers" (Kellerman, 2007, as cited in Gobble, 2017, p.60). Joseph Raelin writes "followership and leadership are in essence part of the same process" (Raelin, 2003, p.36). He continues, "Followers and leaders are interchangeable parts in the conduct of leadership" (Raelin, 2003, p.36). Mark Van Vugt (2006) writes about leaders and followers from an evolutionary standpoint: "Leadership is sometimes regarded as the outcome of a social process in which interacting individuals coordinate their actions to achieve shared goals. According to the notion, leadership cannot be studied without examining the needs and desires of followers" (p. 355). In this way, leadership and followership can be viewed as complementary and congruent roles, with origins and purposes that continue to evolve with the changing needs of people and organizations.

The idea that leaders cannot exist without followers is a fundamental observation underlying emphasis on the role of followership. Ira Chaleff, a leading scholar on followership, illustrates this: "While leadership literature has been relatively silent about follower/ship, the role of followers in the leadership process cannot be overemphasized, as there cannot be a leader

without a follower” (Chaleff, 2008, as cited by Alegbelete & Kaufmen, 2019, p. 34). Leaders take a primary role in the historically hierarchical, dyadic, dualistic, and asymmetrical relationship with followers, but followers play an equally important role in the leader-follower relationship. Hurwitz and Koonce comment:

“It is hard to imagine any other partnership activity where the attention is so singularly focused on one of the roles. It would be like only coaching the quarterback on an American football team while leaving every other positional player to fend for himself” (2017, p. 43).

For this reason, the topic of followership warrants further research and attention. Learning more about the follower role may reveal opportunities for an evaluation of leadership as a concept, and to consider how to better incorporate the follower perspective into creating effective leadership practices.

This study will explore the literature on followership, what constitutes a follower, and follower needs and traits. Research suggests that “leaders’ capacity to lead is always contingent on their capacity to engage effectively with followers and hence is heavily structured by their understanding of those followers” (Bennis, 1999, as cited by Steffens et al, 2018, p. 27). A study of followership may contribute to better leader effectiveness by bringing awareness to the value of Kelley’s followership framework and how to better align leadership approaches with the needs and traits of the people they are trying to lead.

Definition, Connotation, and Stigma

Northouse offers the definition of leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (2013, p. 5). Followership is defined as the willingness to accept the influence of the leader (Bligh, Pillai, & Uhl-Bien, 2009,

as cited by Peters & Haslam, p. 708). The literature expands on this definition: “Traditionally, followership (sometimes called followship) represents the conscious and unconscious behaviors of persons and groups in support of the goals and desires of a leader which have been expressed in words or conduct” (Cox III, Plagens, & Sylla, 2010, p. 38). This supports the idea that “while leadership is defined as a capacity to exert influence over others, followership is defined as a willingness to accept it (Bligh, Pillai, & Uhl-Bien, 2009; Hollander & Webb, 1955, as cited by Peters & Haslam, 2018, p. 708). Robert Kelley’s definition of an effective follower connects with research on the correlation with effective leadership. He states that effective followers:

“have the vision to see both the forest and the tress, the social capacity to work well with others, the strength of character to flourish without heroic status, the moral and psychological balance to pursue personal and corporate goals at no cost to either, and above all, the desire to participate in a team effort for the accomplishment of some greater common purpose” (Kelley, 1998, as cited by Raelin, 2003, p. 36).

In addition to Kelley’s idea that followers possess inherent value is the idea that followers’ function more effectively when treated accordingly.

“Human beings are compounded of cogitation and emotion and do not function well when treated as though they were merely cogs in motion. Their capacity for great and productive labor, creative co-operative work, and loyal self-sacrifice knows no limits provided the whole man, body-mind-and-spirit, is thrown into the program” (Gulick, 1937, as cited by Cox, Plagens & Sylla, p. 43).

The suggestion that traditional leadership theory does not acknowledge the whole of a person in the follower role is a compelling reason for further research on followership.

Negative stigma commonly associated with the word follower precludes recognition of its inherent value. Raelin states, “It is counterproductive...to even use the concept of *follower* since it connotes ‘doing what you are told’ because you are less valuable than the leader” (Raelin, 2003) though he does not propose a word to replace follower and states that he is at a loss for what that word would be. For the purposes of the survey the word *subordinate* is offered but is limited by positionality and implies an ascribed relationship with a leader as opposed to *follower* which implies the choice to follow. Awareness of the limited language options relative to the word follower highlights the limited nature of the concept of follower. Prilipko writes:

“Historically, the common portrayal of leaders and followers as fixed roles is rooted in the industrial age. While leaders are portrayed with fame, heroism, and superhuman qualities almost to the extent of elitism, followers are most commonly described as flaccid, manipulable, and indiscrete masses of voiceless wooden soldiers marching to commands” (Prilipko, 2019, p. 56).

Kellerman describes followers as “low in the hierarchy and have less power, authority, and influence than their superiors. They generally go along to get along, particularly with those in higher positions” (Kellerman, 2007). Kellerman’s observation speaks to the complementary and asymmetrical nature of the leader-follower relationship. Connected with this is the consideration of the compromise inherent to the follower role.

“We need to consider a possible paradox: it combines the dominant view of leadership as a positive, important, and broadly celebrated kind of social practice, and at the same time it must acknowledge the limited enthusiasm that parts of the workforce might feel for leaders in their daily work life, since the follower

positions occupied by most may be experienced as unappealing” (Alvesson & Blom, 2015).

Alvesson & Blom refer to negativity around followership: “Leadership sounds good, but arguably it calls for something that is less enthusiastically embraced: followership” (2015). Ascribing to the follower identity is unappealing because “The traditional leadership discourse has mostly viewed the follower as someone who lacks imagination and is always reliant on the leader” (Argho, 2009, as cited by Alegbeleye & Kaufman, p. 35). This lends to the negative stigma and the sentiment that “No one wants to be seen as a follower. ‘Team player’ perhaps implies some amount of followership but being referred to as a ‘good follower’ never supercharged a career” (Gobble, 2017, p. 59). Chaleff refers to the term followers as “associated with images of ‘docility, conformity, weakness, and failure to excel” (Chaleff, 2009, as cited by Prilipko, 2019, p. 56). The characterization of followers as portrayed by Robert Kelley brings these negative stereotypes into question. Although the term follower implies the choice to position oneself behind or underneath a leader, organizational theory generally posits subordinates as followers in an assigned setting thus removing choice as a factor. However, Kellerman states that followers

“are less likely now than they were in the past to ‘know their place’, to do as they are told, and to keep their opinions to themselves. This change, this small but seismic shift in the balance of power between leaders and followers, constitutes a caution: leaders who ignore or dismiss their followers do so at their own peril” (2008, as cited by Ekundayo et al)

This implies that followers/subordinates can exercise free will to choose followership or not, which will be reflected in their engagement with the organization and with leadership.

The development of the leader follower relationship is deeply rooted in human biological evolution. “An evolutionary analysis assumes that the emergence of leadership is fine-tuned to specific coordination problems that humans have faced across evolutionary history” (cf. Tooby & Cosmides, 1992, as cited by Van Vugt, 2006, p. 356). The concept of leadership as connected with group survival is echoed throughout the literature. “Evolutionary biologists reserve the term leadership for behaviors that determine the type, timing, and duration of group activity” (Krause & Ruxton, 1990, as cited by Van Vugt, 2006, p. 355). The need to satisfy individual and collective human needs contributed to the formation of leader follower relationships. Van Vugt (2006) writes:

“A critical issue is how group members can reach consensus about the type and timing of group action so that they can act together in unity. Usually this can be solved if one individual takes the initiative, and the rest acquiesce and follow. Leader-follower patterns may have emerged in many social species to solve coordination problems such as these.”

In this way, membership in a group with strong leadership dramatically increased the chances for survival. Active participation in the group, and in the leader follower relationship, is therefore an essential biological necessity yet less attention has been devoted to followership as a contributing role. A deconstruction of followership, as it functions in partnership and congruence with leadership, may bring new understanding of and appreciation for the potential benefits of incorporating the follower-centric perspective into effective leadership practice.

Follower Identity

Identity plays a role in the construction of leadership and followership. “Leadership needs to be considered not just as a process in which leaders issue instructions to followers, but as a relational phenomenon in which followership is a key element, calling for people to see

themselves as followers” (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-bien, 2012, as cited in Alvesson & Blom, 2015). According to Carsten and Uhl-Bien, “little is known about how followers see *themselves* and their own roles in the leadership process, that is the followership perspective” (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Robert Kelley, a leading scholar on followership studies, created a followership matrix to identify patterns of follower styles, skills, and principles. He placed followers on the matrix based on their level of independent, critical thinking and engagement (Kelley, 2001) which will be referred to later. He distinguished himself by presenting the idea that not all followers fall into the role by default, but instead choose followership over leadership. MaryAnne Gobble highlights Kelley’s idea that “followership is not merely a transitional state or a training ground for leadership. People may actively choose followership” (Kelley, 1992, as cited by Gobble, 2017, p. 589). Hurwitz and Koonce observe that “In essence, leadership stems from people who are willing and able to take on an active followership role” (2017, p. 42). Considering the limited number of leadership positions in comparison with the abundance of follower positions, it would seem to be a glaring oversight not to recognize the contribution of followers to the practice of leadership. “We’re programmed through education and culture, to strive for leadership. But we mustn’t underestimate the power of conscious, engaged followership – to shape an organization and to change the world” (Gobble, 2017). Leadership theory that more fully incorporates a follower-centric perspective may offer a new lens through which to consider modern approaches to leadership.

The idea of self-identification, of choosing the follower role, is an important distinction to consider in the study of followership and leadership. It brings into question the reasoning behind the lack of study on followership. “The singular focus on leadership would be sensible if followership was innate or of minimal value.” (Hurwitz & Koonz, 2017, p. 43) When we look to

the literature to learn about the absence of focus on followership, we find it can be attributed to the prevalence of negative follower stereotypes, as discussed previously. Kelley comments:

“The leadership role has the glamour and attention. We take courses to learn it, and when we play it well, we get applause and recognition. But the reality is that most of us are more often followers than leaders. Even when we have subordinates, we still have bosses...So followership dominates our lives, but not our thinking, because our preoccupation with leadership keeps us from considering the nature and the importance of the follower” (1998, p. 143).

The overshadowing of followers by leaders is intrinsic to the hierarchical leader follower construction. A study of followers/hip has the potential to expose leadership for its weaknesses which may contribute to why followership is largely understudied and unknown. Familiarity with the term *followership* is more often associated with a religious or political context while application of followership theory to the workplace presents unique contrasts between roles, which are fluid, and identities, which are more permanent. This idea is further explored in the conclusion.

Negative stigma, follower identity, and follower expectations of leaders may stem from mythical and romanticized notions of leaders as heroic and legendary. Manz and Sims write “The word ‘leader’ itself conjures up images of a striking figure on a rearing white horse who is crying ‘follow me!’” (Manz & Sims, 1991, p. 18) This represents an autocratic view of leadership with strength concentrated in the leader warranting complete deference to their authority. Manz and Sims refer to this as “the *strong man*” view that is deeply embedded in western culture (1991). Followers who ascribe to this version of leadership see themselves as dependent upon leaders for their own well-being and their livelihoods. They may expect leaders

to be charismatic and rely on them to inspire and motivate them. If this expectation is not met, it can lead to disappointment and discouragement which subsequently influences their follower behavior and the quality of their relationship with leaders. The phrase *strong man* carries implications for gender to be introduced as a component of leader-follower stereotypes, however, this will not be explicitly considered in this study but is recommended for future studies.

Drawing Correlations Between Followership and Leadership

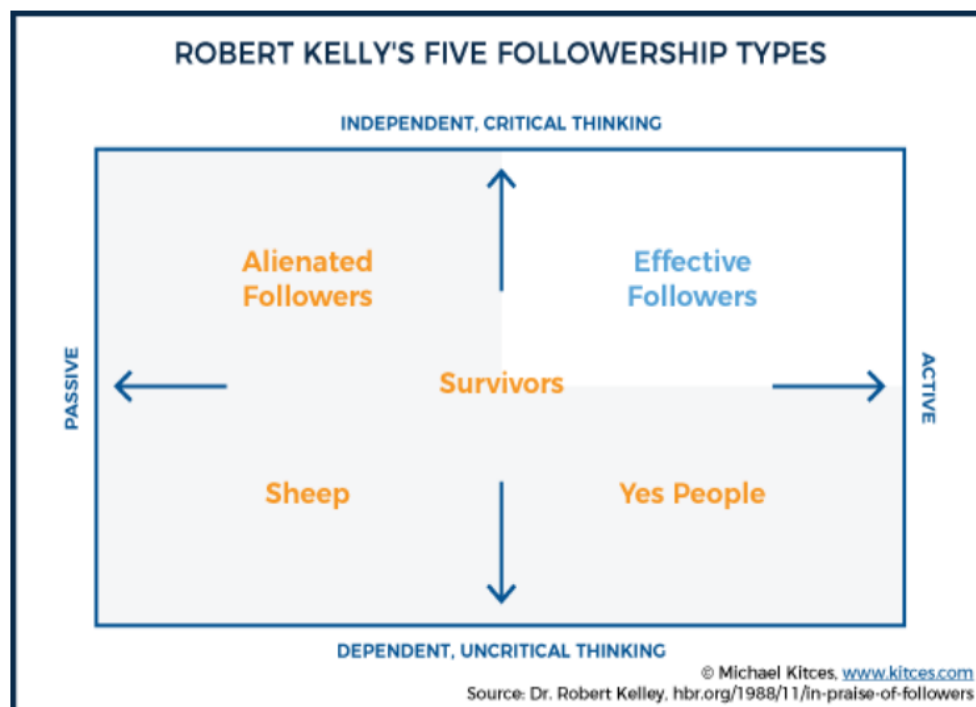
For the purpose of drawing correlations between followership and effective leadership, it is helpful to establish a framework within which to gauge effective leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2007) define an effective leader as someone who “models the way, inspires a shared vision, challenges the process, enables others to act, and encourages the heart” (2007, as cited by Gandolfi & Stone, 2017, p. 20). Because that framework represents a leader-centric view of effective leadership, I will modify it to reflect a more follower-centric view of effective leadership based on the qualities set forth by Robert Kelley of an effective follower. This includes employee performance, the quality of the leader-follower relationship, employee sense of belonging, connection with the mission of the organization, and job satisfaction based on the ability to successfully accomplish short-term tasks and long-term goals. With this framework in mind, the followership and leadership styles, as they are presented in the literature, will be overlaid to draw correlations between them.

Followership Styles, Principles, Skills, and Traits

Robert Kelley wrote several books and articles about followership. His focus on followers lead him to create a follower taxonomy, or typology, where he identified five follower types and placed them in relation to each other on a matrix in accordance with their independent critical thinking levels and engagement with the organization and leadership (Kelley, 1988,

1992, as cited by Gatti et al, p. 270). This provided a framework through which to view follower types, roles, and identities as they appear and function in the workplace and represents the deconstruction of an obscure, amoebas group into clear, defined parts. The follower types, as Kelley broke them down, consist of what he calls ‘Sheep’, Yes Men, Alienated, Survivors, and Effective followers (Kelley, 1988).

Before we delve into an examination of each follower type, it is helpful to provide insight into the qualities Kelley used to create the taxonomy. He rated followers on their levels of individual independent critical thinking and engagement with the organization and with leadership. He associates independent critical thinking with creativity, innovation, self-awareness and self-management while engagement refers to “the propensity to take initiative, participate actively and be self-starters” (Gatti et al, 2014). The degree to which followers exhibit these characteristics determines their place on the matrix, or continuum.



According to Kelley, Sheep are followers who exhibit a low level of independent, critical thinking and a lack of engagement. They demonstrate a lack ambition or sense of responsibility and tend to do only as they are told, then stop (Kelley, 1988). Yes Men are followers who exercise a low level of independent critical thinking skills but who are highly active and engaged. He describes them as “livelier but equally unenterprising” and explains that they depend on the leader for inspiration which causes them to be “aggressively deferential, even servile” (Kelley, 1998). Marianne Gobble refers to them as “sycophants who never question the boss’s judgement” (Gobble, 2017). Kelley describes Alienated followers as those who exercise a high level of independent critical thinking but who behave passively with a low level of engagement due to a discouraging incident or experience that turned them off (Kelley, 1988). They present as cynical and “sink gradually into disgruntled acquiescence, seldom opposing a leader’s efforts” (Kelley, 1998). Gobble describes them as “disengaged cynics who question everything but rarely act” (Gobble, 2017). Kelley’s matrix includes a fourth follower style that he calls Survivors. They lay in the center of the matrix because they are adept at change and skilled at varying their degree of critical thinking and engagement as needed for self-preservation (Kelley, 1988).

The last kind of follower in the typology are Effective followers who Kelley describes as those who exercise high levels of independent critical thinking and self-management, and who demonstrate the highest levels of engagement (Kelley, 1988). In Kelley’s work, Effective followers receive the most attention because, according to Kelley, they offer the most benefits to their peers and organizations. He describes them as assertive, energetic, well-balanced, responsible, risk-takers, and self-starters, who practice self-management and exhibit sound independent judgment. Effective followers demonstrate competence and are committed to the

organization and “to a person, principle, or something outside of themselves” (Kelley, 1988).

The fact that more of Kelley’s attention was devoted to Effective followers than the other follower types, is significant and will be included as part of the analysis with a discussion of the possibilities and limitations of his typology.

Leadership Styles, Principles, Skills, and Traits

To build a correlation between followership and leadership, five leadership types were selected to represent a continuum of leadership that vary in their levels of directiveness, or top-down communication. Autocratic and transactional leadership represent highly directive leadership styles while laissez-faire, servant and transformational represent lower levels of directive leadership. A definition of each leadership type will be discussed to then draw potential correlations between the five leadership styles and the five follower types.

Autocratic, or authoritative, leadership is highly directive, leader-centric, and results-driven rather than people-driven, where the leader makes the decisions, expects followers to obey and comply with orders. Autocratic leaders are also “hands-on leaders who take charge and set clear expectations for the what, when, why, and how tasks done by followers should be completed” (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017, p. 25). This is a top-down approach where quick decision making can take place without the need to consult with subordinates or make decisions democratically. This style is found in settings where perfection and consistency are required, such as manufacturing or the restaurant industry where customers have specific expectations of quality and service. Autocratic leaders who demonstrate commitment to the well-being of their employees and to the success of the company through communication and respect are more likely to be successful.

Transactional leaders “tend to focus on transactions in furtherance of a set of goals rather than show concern for the people executing those goal.” (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016, as cited by Gandolfi & Stone, 2017, p. 23). This style is leader-centric with emphasis on outcomes and results. It is based on the exchanges between leaders and followers in the context of the leader communicating to the follower, “if you give me X, I will give you Y” (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017, p. 24). Transactional leadership “refers to the bulk of leadership models” (Northouse, 2013, p. 186) with many different examples ranging from the offer of a bonus or promotion for reaching a sales goal, or a teacher giving a student a grade, or politician making a promise to win votes.

Servant leadership is follower-centric and reliant on follower input for decision making. Characteristics of a servant leader include “listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people and building community” (Spears, 2002, as cited by Northouse, 2013, p. 221-222). Servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1970, as cited by Northouse, 2013, p. 220). Servant leaders see themselves as followers. This puts them on more equal footing with followers making it easier for followers to relate to them. For example, a manager who approaches employees with a genuine concern for their well-being and interest in their opinion and perspective as opposed to an approach that focuses solely on maintain strict adherence to company policies and procedures and the exclusion of individual experiences and contributions within those directives.

Transformational leadership is follower-centric but mission-driven where the leader “must appeal to the ideals of the followers in order to influence them” (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017, p. 24). The leader depends on the input and influence of followers to accomplish organizational goals so they are attentive to “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a

connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and follower”

(Northouse, 2013, p. 186). This type of leader tends to:

“empower their followers; delegate significant authority to individuals or teams; eliminate unnecessary controls; develop follower skill and self-confidence, as well as greater awareness of the importance of task outcomes; and aspire to satisfy their higher order needs, such as a sense of belonging and connection with a larger collective” (Yuki, 2012, as cited by Averin, 2019, p. 119).

Northouse gives the example of Gandhi as a transformational leader who “raised the hopes and demands of millions of his people, and, in the process, was changed himself” (Northouse, 2013, p. 186). A transformational leadership approach can be instrumental in times of managerial change to foster a sense of community and belonging through transition and uncertainty.

Framework for Analysis

This study is intended to define and deconstruct followership in a professional setting, to bring awareness to the follower role in the leader-follower relationship, to highlight and questions traditional hierarchical approaches to leadership, and to draw connections between followership and leadership to enhance the effectiveness of both.

Analysis will be conducted through Robert Kelley’s followership typology that categorizes followers into five types on a continuum based on their level of independent critical thinking and engagement, as defined in the literature. Kelley’s work is juxtaposed with five leadership types that represent varying degrees of directiveness to draw correlations between them and to consider the follower role as it contributes to the practice of leadership.

The audience is comprised of graduate students in the leadership program at Granite State College and people with whom I have a professional or personal connection who have an interest

in completing the survey. Students in the leadership program received the survey link by email and non-leadership students completed the survey through links posted online.

A reflection on the current state of followership as it relates to the creation and enactment of leadership will shed light on the modern follower role as hierarchical structures flatten in response to technological advances, increased speed of communication, and the demands of people entering the labor market. As such, expectations of leaders and followers evolve with shifts in social identity and modern demands that reflect individual and collective needs. The survey seeks to garner insight into perspective on followership and leadership, and to seek opportunities to positively evolve the leader follower relationship in response to change.

Professionally, information revealed about followership and leadership will be incorporated into my practice as a non-leader and in potential future leadership roles to enhance my own follower and leader effectiveness.

Methodology

A survey was conducted to gather data about experience with and perspectives on followership and leadership. The survey was completed by students in the graduate leadership program at Granite State College and by people who have not studied leadership at the graduate level.

Survey Questions:

- Self-identification as follower or leader
- Describe the connotations that you associate with the word *follower*
- Describe the connotations that you associate with the word *leader*
- Describe familiarity with the followership and leadership as terms
- Self-identify as leadership student
- In your experience as a follower, describe your follower style
- In your experience as follower, describe what leadership style you prefer
- In your experience as a leader, describe your leadership style
- In your experience as leader, describe what followership style you prefer

Analysis and Conclusion

Out of 100 survey respondents, 67.35% identify themselves as both a leader and a follower with 25.51% identifying more as a leader and 5.1% identifying more as a follower. Regarding connotations of *follower*, 43.26% perceive *follower* as somewhat negative, 29.47% perceive it as neither positive nor negative, and 15.79% perceive it as somewhat positive. Regarding connotations of *leader*, 82.98% perceive *leader* as extremely positive or somewhat positive. Regarding familiarity with *followership*, 40.43% are not familiar at all and 54.25% are very, moderately, or slightly familiar while 98.93% of respondents are extremely or very familiar with *leadership*.

Effective Followership is Leadership

Kelley concludes that “the qualities that make effective followers are, confusingly enough, pretty much the same qualities found in some effective leaders.” (1998, p. 146) Paired with that idea is the observation that “Self-leadership is also the essence of effective followership” (Manz & Sims, 1991, p.23). Building on both of these ideas is the fact that “In the real world, very few people serve solely as leaders or followers. Most people occupy both roles, often simultaneously, in an organizational setting” (Chaleff, 2016). Peters & Haslam note that “it is possible for leader and follower identities to coexist within a person (albeit in different contexts and at different times)” (2018). Followership as a role as opposed to an identity allows people “to constantly switch between leader-follower roles. This would make followership (and leadership) like the hats we wear, such that we can choose to wear different hats depending on the situation” (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019). In this way, it is convenient that the skillsets are roughly the same to accommodate the need to shift between the two roles. It can therefore be said that “followership may be viewed as a form of leadership; followers must adopt some characteristics of leadership when embracing the role of follower” (Jerry, 2013, p. 348). This positions the qualities of effective leadership and followership in more than close alignment, but as one in the same.

Kelley references followership in the context evolving organizational structures; “In an organization of effective followers, a leader tends to be more an overseer of change and progress than a hero. As organizational structures flatten, the quality of those who follow will become more and more important. As Chester I. Barnard wrote 50 years ago in *The Functions of an Executive*, ‘The decision as to

whether an order has authority or not lies within the person to whom it is addressed and does not reside in ‘persons of authority’ or those who issue orders”

(Kelley, 1988, p. 144).

The quality to which Kelley refers is exemplified by the characteristics of an effective follower, and the correlation between those who consider themselves effective followers and their preferred leadership styles is clear from the survey results, are characterized as low directive, (transformational, servant, and laissez-faire). This is consistent with collaborative, non-hero styles of leadership that represent leaders sharing power with followers.

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