

# FOLLOW THE CROWD WITHOUT CONSIDERING WHY: PASSIVE FOLLOWERS IN ORGANIZATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of followership, the identification of styles of followership styles and the structuring of power in follower-organized organizations are relatively new paradigms, as the point of view is that followership is an influential factor independent of leadership. This study is concentrate on passive followership style among employees in the organization. The main features of passive followers are listed. Lastly, the practical implications of moving from passive to exemplary followers are given

**Key words:** followership, passive followers, leadership, organization



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite the increasing interest in the follower and the followership over time, appropriate and clear definitions cannot yet be identified. The definition of followership and follower evolves as the number of studies focused on the concept of followership increases.

According to Shamir (2007) in the academic literature there are five different views on the relationship between leader and follower. From a standpoint of followers, they are seen as recipients of the influence of the leader, which means that the followers do not play an active role in the leadership process; they are only influenced by the leader's behaviour. Followers are then seen as moderators of the leader's influence. Therefore followers with their abilities, attitudes and motivations moderate the influence of leaders. According to the third way of looking at followers within literature, followers serve as a substitute for leadership so that followers' abilities, motivation, and norms can eliminate the need for leadership, providing the necessary guidance, motivation, and support. The fourth view identifies followers as constructors of leadership, which include three different aspects of leadership creation: leadership romance, when followers attribute power to leaders to establish control and understand the environment, then psychoanalytic product theories according to which leadership of projection and transfer to followers, with leaders symbolizing a father, mother, or other powerful figure, which reduces anxiety and provides psychological support to followers. This group also includes social identity theory, where the development of a leader's charisma is linked to the group's prototype, and the leadership position is attributed to the one who exhibits the most typical group behaviour and characteristics. In the fifth way, researchers view followers as leaders. These include all approaches that disagree with the distinction of leader and follower; hence leadership is not a role but a function or activity that can be performed by any member of the group or organization. A radical view would be that everyone could be both a leader and a follower, while a milder view would be that the leadership of the group could rotate with each member depending on their skills and needs.

Seeking appropriate alternatives to negative connotations of followers, most often authors use the terms partners, participants, and collaborators (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The term constituent or component is commonly used by authors who analyse leadership in a political or micro politic context

(Birnbaum, 1988; Eddy, 2010; Gardner, 1990; Glasman & Heck, 1996). Although these authors strive for political correctness, many authors define the term follower as a neutral term. The term subordinate, Yukl (2006), is used to denote the existence of a formal authority of the leader over those under his influence. Since the early eighties of the twentieth century, the term followers has become increasingly used as a synonym for subordinates, a breakthrough from the traditional managerial discourse of supervisor-to-subordinate. However, the term subordinate is still used, as in Northouse's book (2008), in the index of notions for the term follower it is written see subordinates.

The main question posed by twenty-first-century organizational psychologists is not how leaders and followers differ, but how leadership models can be reformulated to treat all members of the system, both leaders and followers (Hackman & Wageman, 2007).

Traditionally, leaders have been identified as the creators and initiators of renewal and change, while followers are only implementers (Avolio, 2007).

Hollander (1974; according to Baker, 2007) explains the view of followers in the seventies of the twentieth century as "non-leaders ... essentially passive remaining category". Baker (2007) describes the general belief that followers simply obey orders. A similar view holds Frisina (2005; according to Hopton, Christie, & Barling, 2012) that followers are people who lack ambition and motivation. Alcorn (1992) presents followers as sheep subordinates who are unimaginative and forever stupid. Berg (1998) states that participants in his leadership and follow-up workshops in the early nineties of the twentieth century used the words "sheep", "passive", "obedient", "servants", "lemmings" (people without their own). He attributes these negative associations to organizational and psychological humiliation of the follower's role.

Carsten & Uhl-Bien (2012) note, followers are active participants in the leadership process, emphasizing their essential importance in creating leadership. In their research, they have attempted to assess the extent to which followers see their role as partnering with leadership, identifying and solving problems, and bringing forward new and creative ideas that improve efficiency. The findings of the research indicate that there is a positive relationship between beliefs about leadership creativity and communication upward, that is, communication with leaders, as constructive resistance and the right to vote. They define constructive resistance as a form of objection or disagreement, which involves

challenging the leader to seek involvement in the action and working together with the leader to devise a more appropriate plan. Further, they found that followers who had lower beliefs about productivity spoke more when they perceived a higher quality of relationship with the leader and perceived an autonomous work environment. Conversely, followers with stronger beliefs in productivity speak as much as followers with weaker beliefs in productivity, regardless of whether the context was favourable or unfavourable. With this research, the authors suggest that the basics of sequencing can be broadened by understanding the co-production of leadership.

Burns (1978; according to Northouse, 2008) noted that leadership discussions are sometimes defined as elitist given the power with which leadership relates, as well as the importance attributed to leaders in the leader-follower relationship. Leaders are no more important than followers, leaders and followers are two sides of a coin.

## **FOLLOWERSHIP TYPOLOGY**

The first typology of followership is provided by Zaleznik (1965). Zaleznik (1965) proposes a typology of followers based on Freud's point of view, while attempting to develop Zaleznik's 2x2 model of followership, where he performed comparisons based on the dimensions of activity / passivity and dominance / submission. In this way, there are obtained four quadrants of this model, namely four types of followers: impulsive followers, compulsive followers, masochistic followers, and withdrawn followers. This typology of subordinates/followers is introduced both as a means of helping leaders better understand how to deal with followers, but also as providing direction to followers who aspire to positions of leadership.

Although Zaleznik provided the first typology, clearly the most cited early work on followership is that of Robert Kelley (1988; according to Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Kelley identified followership styles based on an assessment that measures independent thinking and actively carrying out the role of the follower (Kelley, 1992).

People spend most of their time as followers, so it seems logical that their functioning as followers, for the most amounts, has an impact on job satisfaction. People who do their job well feel better overall in life than people who are not very happy with their job performance.

Kelley from his work experience has noticed the problem most employees are faced with, how to do their job best, following when they have little insight into, how to handle the role of follower? Accordingly Kelley designed a questionnaire to determine the style of followership and discover each follower's strengths, as well as identify the followership skills to be developed. Asking employees about followership styles, he received two types of answers, one that followers are a flock of sheep who do not know where to go, and the other that followers are an obedient flock of sheep who cannot say no to their leaders.

Examining employees with more detailed information, describing themselves, how they do their job, what makes them the best or the worst team workers, what sets them apart from others, what makes them happy or unhappy summarized the results and identified several styles of followership. Reveals a map of how to be a better apprentice, student, mentor, colleague and part of the team. The style of followership is based on two dimensions: active engagement, which ranges from activity to passivity and independent thinking, which ranges from independent, critical to dependent, uncritical thinking. The categories of follower styles are not personality traits but determine how the individual plays the follower role. In different circumstances, different sequences of styles can be used. Kelley defined five styles of followers: alienated followers, conformist, passive, pragmatic, and exemplary followers.

## **PASSIVE FOLLOWERS**

Passive followers support leaders, their judgment and opinion, take on activities only to which the leader instructs them. They work under the supervision of a leader. Passive followers are part of a mass that agrees with the boss's mind without thinking. According to their personal efforts, they will never take them away, they think that they should not waste their time, energy and the ideas of putting them before the leader, because the leader will certainly do what he thinks and therefore the leader and the group should follow best. Passive followers lack initiative and a sense of responsibility, and they need someone to persistently directs them and tell them what to do.

Leaders believe that passive followers are such because of their personality characteristics. They describe passive followers as lazy, incapable, unmotivated and without ideas. There are extremely passive

followers who have the "herd instinct," that is, to be sheep. They cannot act without the leader, so they cling to him.

According to Kelley (1992), passive followers are those who have not developed the following skills. Whereas, another group of passive followers are those who do not want to be followers, and when they find themselves in the role of followers, they are confined to themselves and do not use their intellectual abilities. Passive follow-up is often a response to the leader's expectations. When a leader treats his followers as sheep, he will get what he expects and the followers will behave like sheep. When a leader sends a message to his followers that they will be guilty if they make a mistake, the followers will not experiment, not engage in new projects, express their views and ideas, do not want to take risks because they are likely to do mistake for which they will be responsible. So they will accept the leader to give orders and thereby bear responsibility.

Leaders, who take responsibility for everything, make decisions by themselves and persistently encourage, attract followers who fit into a passive role.

Dependent, uncritical passive followers are cast as being reluctant to voice personal reservations, remaining spectator-like and contributing little.

The passive follower is opposite of exemplary follower, is identified by a computed score that is low on independent thinking and low on active engagement. Passive followers do not provide voluntary or constructive efforts towards the organization's success (Li, Chiaburu, Kirkman, & Xie, 2013). Passive followers tend to tire out leaders and teams due to their lack of willingness to participate in workloads, and they are not actively engaging in their tasks (Kelley, 1992). Based on Gallup's (2007; according to Rook, 2018) definition of engagement, a passive follower would have minimal engagement or be not engaged. Moreover, based on Etzioni's (1961; according to Rook, 2018) types of involvement, the passive follower would be considered alienative in that the follower's intrinsic value for output would be dependent upon the leader and/or organization. The passive follower is the most commonly quoted perception of followership in that it has long been assumed that followers are passively molded by leadership (Hall & Densten, 2002; according to Rook, 2018). Organizations and teams agonize with passive followers due to the lack of autonomy in which they can work and its direct drain on personnel resources required to oversee the actions and productivity of the passive follower (Rook, 2018).

### Moving from passive to exemplary style of followership

Passive followers can learn to be exemplary followers, but they need to understand that following someone is not just sending without thinking or being passive or just an observer. This means that they need to learn to invest in themselves and their abilities for the purposes of the organization, as well as to learn to think independently and critically.

Encouraging the implementation of followership development programs is encouraged, to take the initiative to establish or reinforce the existing values within the organization, to model the role of effective followers and to start the mentoring process. This study has significant implications for what the organization prefers from its employees, from passivity, subordination and obedience to proactivity, how co-leadership or partnership and how their styles of succession fit into the organizational climate. It is recognized that the organization should not only aspire to exemplary followers, but to consider the integration of followership and leadership styles

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