

Title

The Romance of the Follower – Part 2

Abstract

Purpose – In our first paper, we surveyed the research on followership, showing it has significant practical importance in enhancing career and organizational value. In Part 2 we present a comprehensive framework to understand followership and clarify how and where followership is different (and the same) as leadership. We then show how previous research fits into this new framework, as well as highlighting gaps and opportunities. Part 3 will present examples of how this model can be used as a training tool, in mentoring, for performance appraisals, and for designing HR solutions.

Design/methodology/approach – We present a new framework for followership, articulate its features, and put it into the context of previous ideas about followership.

Findings – There are real and important differences between leadership and followership. Some attributes and characteristics are unique to good followers while others are generally applicable to all employees, such as intelligence. Finally, followership can be understood as two separate competencies: leader support and personal manageability, which refer to situation-specific and generic followership behaviours respectively.

Originality/value – This paper presents a new way of understanding followership, and of putting it into perspective with leadership. As such, the three articles are of particular interest to senior executives and HR departments.

Keywords – leadership, followership, followship, career development, organizational development

Paper type – Conceptual paper

Content

1. Introduction

Consider the CEO who is a successful leader but terrible follower: she will eventually run afoul of her Board of Directors or shareholders with predictable consequences. Or consider the middle manager who follows well but cannot lead: he may appear valuable to his boss as long as he can oversee every part of his staff's work, but this is unsustainable, bad for staff development, and reduces overall effectiveness. Creative, successful organizations depend on a confluence of excellence in leadership and followership – since most people are both, most could benefit from training in both (see Figure 1).

Followership is an equal partner in the value-creating dance. Indeed dancing is an apt analogy. Imagine for a moment watching a couple burn up the dance floor doing a hot South American tango. It can be a breathtaking flow of harmony and quick steps, where each dancer plays a specific part to make the whole work – one of them leads and the other follows. If you have ever taken dance lessons then you know it takes time, dedication, and effort to learn to lead or follow effectively. Unless both partners are proficient at their respective roles the final result is diminished. Having a strong leader push his partner around the floor is barely dancing. Having a strong follower pull her leader around is, at best, mediocre. Only the combination of technical mastery of the steps with good leader/follower partnership skills creates a winning combination.

To summarize, here are the key points from the previous paper and this one:

- Leadership and followership are separate and independent roles
- Most people do both
- Followership is critical to organizational and personal effectiveness

Because of this, individuals should make it a personal priority to further develop their own leadership and followership competencies; managers should be able to coach followership

within their teams; HR departments should provide resources to support it; and organizations should make followership an area of emphasis. We believe this positive view of followership is important enough to require rebranding and, to that end, we prefer to use the term *followship* instead of *followership* to represent effective followers. Followers are not sheep, they are not passive recipients of a leader's directives, and they are definitely not a personality type as has sometimes been suggested (i.e., the ludicrous claim that someone is a follower because they want to follow – following is a role not an attitude). Rather, followers are active partners in a relationship, and whose followship skills are critical to achieving the group's goals.

The challenge, however, is knowing what followship entails. For example, followship skills and behaviours are often conflated with those of leadership. Consider the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research project, the largest and most comprehensive world-wide study on leadership ever undertaken (House et al., 2004, Chapter 8; see also the online reference under GLOBE Survey Instruments). It was a collaboration of almost 200 social scientists spanning 62 cultures during a ten year period – over 17,000 middle managers were surveyed and the results were then analyzed to see how beliefs about leadership varied across countries, cultures, and socio-demographic factors. In one part of the survey (the full survey consisted of 753 items) middle managers were asked to rate characteristics or behaviours relevant to outstanding leadership on a scale from 1-7; a score of 1 meant the characteristic greatly inhibited the person from being an outstanding leader, while a score of 7 meant it greatly contributed to being an outstanding leader. Table 1 contains some of the characteristics measured in the GLOBE survey but without the descriptives given in the original.

Using the same scale of 1-7, fill in the first column, 'Score L', of Table 1. Note: items with an asterisk were not part of the GLOBE survey but score these items the same way.

Score L	Characteristic or Behaviour	Score F
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	Loyal	
	Intelligent	
	Self-Motivated	
	Intra-Group Conflict Avoider	
	Inspirational	
	Enthusiastic	
	Risk Taker	
	Improvement Oriented	
	Prepared	
	Collaborative	
	Morale Booster	
	Concise Communicator*	
	Supportive*	
	Creative*	

Table 1: Survey of characteristics or behaviours associated with leader/follower success. *These items were not in the GLOBE Leadership survey.

Once you are finished, cover up the left-hand column and picture a really strong follower, perhaps one of your staff or a peer who was recently promoted. Thinking about the attributes that make them a strong follower, put a score in the last column, 'Score F', where 1 means it greatly inhibits being a follower, and a 7 means it greatly contributes to being an outstanding follower.

Now compare the leftmost and rightmost columns. Which attributes received the same scores? Did any differ by two or more? If you are like most people who have taken this abbreviated survey, some attributes will receive the same score but not others. Also, if you share the survey with a colleague, we expect it will generate some interesting debates over the differences. Partly this is because each attribute can be interpreted contextually: Is being able to inspire subordinates the same skill as being able to inspire a leader? Partly it could be due to cultural differences as is discussed extensively in the analysis of the GLOBE data. The main reason, however, is because many of these characteristics are not specific to leaders or to followers. Effective leadership and followership both require a high degree of *intelligence*, *enthusiasm*, and *creativity* while others, such as *inspirational*, are clearly more relevant to

one role over the other. This overlap explains some of the confusion between followship and leadership; they are different, but good employees regardless of role have many shared attributes. The role-specific attributes explain why leadership training is insufficient for building strong followship skills.

We have found that the set of role-specific attributes of a follower can be organized into two core competencies: *personal manageability* and *leader support*. We will describe these two competencies shortly and then show how other followship models fit into this framework. In our third and final paper, we will describe how to use this framework in improving organizational effectiveness, employee morale, and personnel development.

2. Core competencies

Personal manageability is about behaviours which are effective with any leader in any organization. When the situation is new – a management change, job move, or merger and acquisition (M&A) – these behaviours do not change. The simplest way to visualize personal manageability is to consider what would still need to be done and how it would be done if there were no leaders. Such behaviours include always fully encompassing the accountabilities of the job; never undermining decisions made by someone else (especially those of your leader); staying positive about the job, peers and the company; and providing solid decision support and then supporting decisions once they are made.

Leader support is about adapting to the leader, the department, the organization, and the culture. This is done through understanding, promoting, and being passionate about the same goals; championing the organization and its culture; supporting the broader objectives that are external to your role; thinking outside the box while thinking inside the leader's box (often what is meant by being strategic); and by working hard to appreciate and align to the

leader’s style. Whenever a situation changes the follower must rethink leader support behaviours while retaining personal manageability ones.

Table 2 provides an outline of some of the core aspects of each competency. In reviewing the list notice how the *definition and examples* of each are specific to following, and independent of leading. For example, communication is a general skill but here we only highlight aspects such as the dictum of ‘no surprises’, which is specifically relevant to upwards communication by followers.

Personal Manageability Competency	
Components	Definition and Examples
Communication	<p>While elements of communication are specific to the leader or situation, there are general skills that are always valuable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform without inundating. • No surprises. • Summarize ruthlessly. • Expose your thinking behind actions and decisions.
Attitude	<p>Great followers recognize that the right attitude influences their environment and all the people in it. It also affects their personal well-being. Some of the key dictums include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in character – be predictable to the leader. • Learn to back-off when too personally invested. • Stay positive about your job, your peers, and the company. • Be self-motivated.
Etiquette	<p>In her book, <i>Don’t Take the Last Donut</i>, Judith Bowman defines business etiquette as a set of signals that show respect, inspire confidence, and earn trust. Followship etiquette demonstrates respect for the boss and respect for the organization. For example, in everyday conversation, cultural norms dictate who gets the last word; in business, good followers ensure the leader does.</p>
Full Accountability	<p>This is about looking at your job with a different lens, using the perspective of the organization. Your job is not about executing a series of tasks but, rather, it is about getting results, ensuring continuity, following-up, understanding the context, and taking full accountability for the results. For example, if you are responsible for chairing a meeting it means more than taking attendance, making sure the projector works, booking a room, or following an agenda. It also means taking accountability for a successful outcome and for ensuring that decisions made at the meeting get followed-up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be vigilant that all job tasks are looked after. • Think of your job as a going concern. Ensure ease of job continuity and personal succession planning.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create your job description if one does not exist, but be ready to change it as circumstances warrant. • Your organization seeks to improve each year by earning 10% more, reducing costs, or other tangible performance objectives. Create your own growth targets that align with the organizational or departmental targets. • Get the right job done and the job done right. Critically assess information to ensure that purpose and job objectives are clear.
Decisions	<p>There are two kinds of decisions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ones the leader makes or the leader is required to follow; 2. Those the follower makes. <p>Distinguishing between the two is important. Good followers make decisions within their purview and provide decision support to the leader otherwise. Once a decision is made, good followers implement it in ways that provide maximum value while honouring the intent. Although decisions can be job, leader, or organization specific, the skills are the same regardless of the situation.</p>

Table 1: Skills that are part of the core competency of personal manageability.

Leader Support Competency	
Components	Definition
Leader Goals	This is about aligning and supporting the leader's goals along with those of the organization. It is important to recognize that those goals are broader than the follower's job accountabilities. It includes taking on tasks that add value to the leader or which the leader dislikes doing. It means looking for key activities that no-one has taken accountability for.
Rapport	<p>When someone is important to you, you take the time to do the little things that create a better relationship. Building rapport takes time and is made up of many small critical moments. This is not about friendship, it is about a strong, working relationship. In our followship focus groups the number one way we were told followers build rapport is by bringing coffee in to their boss on occasion. It is a nice touch that gives you a chance for small talk. There are many ways to enhance rapport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up on something the leader casually mentioned they were interested in. • Be a safe zone for your leader by keeping their confidences. • Make sure you save a good seat or food for your leader at meetings. • Help your leader celebrate successes. • Keep your leader abreast of staff events such as engagements, birthdays, or certifications so that they can congratulate and have the opportunity to connect.
Culture	It is important to be an active member of the organizational culture and distinguish yourself in culturally appropriate ways. As Robert Greene says in his book, <i>48 Laws of Power</i> , "Think as you like, but behave like others." If the culture is to show up early to meetings, then show up early. If it requires formal business attire, come in a suit.
Style	While a leader has many followers, each follower only has one leader so it stands to reason that the onus should be on the follower to adapt to the leader's style. Style elements include preferred method for communications, best time of day/week to hold meetings, or how to give bad news. There are many dimensions of style that can

	be identified through assessment tools such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Kirton Adaptor Innovator Inventory on creative preferences, or FourSight.
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Table 2: Skills that are part of the core competency of leader support.

3. Integrating Other Models

In the first paper we discussed trait-based and attribute-based models of followship. The main trait-based models were: engagement (Kellerman, 2007; Kelley, 1992), courage (Chaleff, 1995), independent thinking (Kelley, 1992), dominance and activity levels (Zaleznik, 1964), and relationship and performance initiatives (Potter et al., 1996). Although these traits are not specific to followship, it is easy to see how each can be made follower-specific and incorporated into one or both of the two core competencies.

Specific attributes of good followers by earlier authors are listed in Table 2 of the first paper in this series. We now categorize these behaviours as personal manageability, leader support, or relevant to being a good employee regardless of the role (leader, follower, team member).

Personal Manageability	Leader Support	Good Employee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops themselves • Drives own growth • Believes in the importance of being a good follower • Values their own independence • A balancing act – follows while offering up ideas, self-motivated and self-directed • Does not blame the boss; supports and does not undermine • Accepts responsibility (when given it) • Does homework; gives boss the info to make a decision; anticipates questions • Tells the truth and doesn't quibble; your boss will be giving advice up the chain of command based on what you said • When making a recommendation, remember who will probably have to implement it. This means you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops leaders • Anticipates (leader's needs) • Is a player for all seasons • Looks beyond themselves • Is familiar with their leader and his job, and anticipates his requirements • Team member, not a yes man 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets involved • Generates ideas • Willing to collaborate • Fights in private and keeps it private • Stays current • If they see a problem, fixes it • Puts in more than an honest day's work, but doesn't forget their family • Is technically and tactically proficient • Sets the example for others • Considers integrity of paramount importance • Functions well in change-oriented environments • Functions well on teams • Makes sound and timely decisions and recommendations • Thinks independently and critically

<p>must know your own limitations and weaknesses as well as your strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your boss informed of what's going on • Makes a decision and runs it past the boss • Complies with orders and initiates appropriate actions in the absence of orders • Develops a sense of responsibility and takes responsibility for own actions • Keeps leader informed • Understands the task and ethically accomplishes it • Displays loyalty 		
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The above items were compiled from Bossidy (2007), Thody (2000), Meilinger (2001), Infantry magazine (as quoted in Townsend, 2000), and Latour and Rest (2004).

It is interesting to note how few elements fit in the leader support category. We believe that that there are just as many attributes associated with leader support but that it has received little attention. Partly this is because followers are often thought of as junior employees; people do not usually use senior leaders – in the executive suite or just below – as models when they generate followship attributes. This is unfortunate as these top talents are often the best followers. With this cohort in mind, it is easy to create a much larger and more robust list of attributes including adapting and quickly aligning to a new leader, being very aware of the goals of the leader, or adapting to a culture change that more experienced staff tend to be good at.

4. Conclusion

As Coyne and Coyne (2007) point out in their HBR article, *Surviving Your New CEO*, what a new leader looks for in their direct reports are behaviours that have little to do with traditional performance measures such as technical proficiency or leadership. Their advice is distilled into seven messages: show your goodwill, leave your baggage at the door, study the

CEO's working style, understand the CEO's agenda, present a realistic and honest game plan, be on your "A" game, and offer objective options. This is generally sound advice but it is by no means comprehensive. As an alternative, we have presented a structured model based on two core competencies – personal manageability and leader support – that add substance to, and organize, such lists.

In the final article we will show how this competency framework can be used to diagnose specific workplace issues both for individual employees and at the organizational level.

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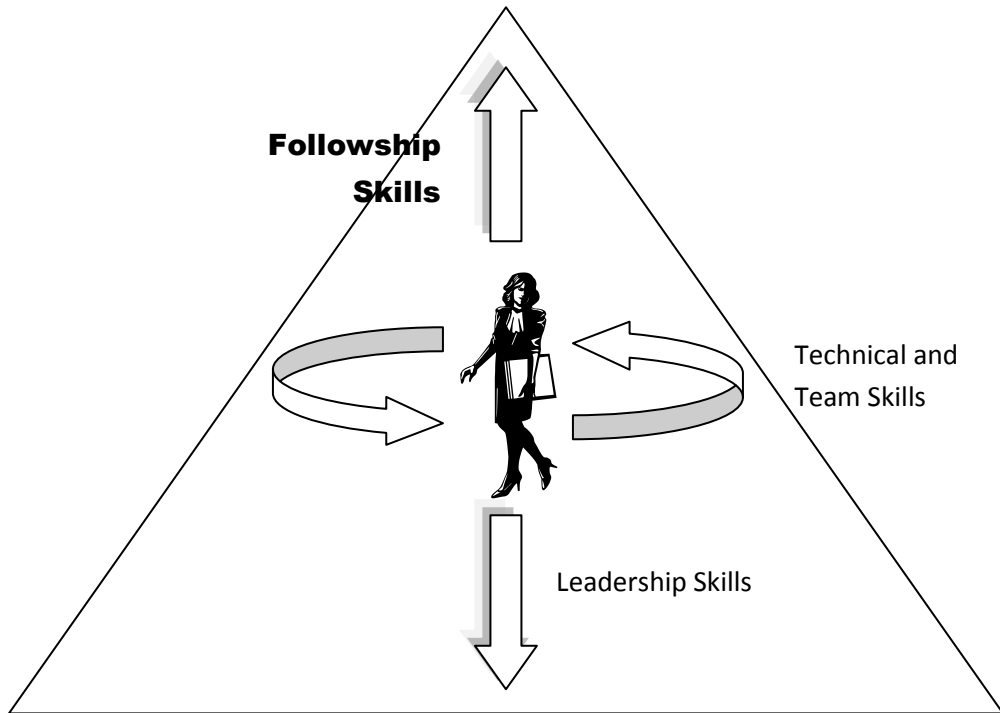


Figure 1: Different skill sets needed within the organizational pyramid.