

UNDERSTANDING LEADER-FOLLOWER DYNAMICS IN ORGANIZATION: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Leader and follower connect themselves through synergic dynamics. More often than not, they identify themselves as a unit and practically plan organizational development and progress to achieve similar strategies and objectives. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) stated that the development of a leader-member exchange is based on characteristics of the 'working relationship' as opposed to a personal or friendship relationship. Leaders create unity through demonstration of group-mindedness by making more references to the collective history, the collective identity and interests, and collective efficacy (Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993). The more leaders augment follower identification (through role modeling or group socialization), the more followers will likely experience higher feelings of ownership and responsibility (Dick et.al, 2007). To understand these dynamics, reciprocal effect of both parties are reviewed and discussed. This paper intends to recognize the relationship of leader and follower and how they relate to each other in groups.

Keywords: leader-follower dynamics, organizational identification, leader-follower psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Human relations are inevitable to sustain the existence of organizations. More often than not, groups with good human relations succeed faster and longer than the groups with weak inter-connections. Sustaining these relationships isn't easy. It requires persistent effort from each organizational member and their surroundings. The essence of organizational membership is leader-follower dynamics. In organizational settings, leadership expectations do not exist in a vacuum. It seems likely that the anticipations of both leaders and followers may impact the leader-follower relationship (Keller & Cacioppe, 2001). Hence, it is very important for both leader and follower to understand each other's needs. An enthusiastic leader might frustrate himself in his effort to build a relationship with an avoidant follower, and vice versa.

In maintaining leader-follower dynamics, Van Knippenberg et.al. (2004) found out that leaders act through their followers and a leader's behavior is successful because it is translated into followers' actions by the followers' self-construal. A leader who activates followers' self-construal will somehow affect followers' feeling, thoughts and actions in the name of group norms. In a group, it is important that followers identify their leaders as a respectable icon, with a distinguished personality. Leaders will ensure that they receive substantial amount of identification from his followers. In order to create this social identification, leaders sometimes have to prove his charisma and outstanding self-worth. There is consistent evidence that social identification leads to greater efforts on behalf of the group. As leaders are also members of the group, identification would also serve as a motivator to act on behalf of the group's interest (Dick et. al, 2007). To some extent, these motivations could lead to leaders' engaging in self-sacrificing behaviors. Self-sacrificing behaviors include the willingness to take on a bigger workload or providing assistance to employee in completing their work. Employees will be inspired and surprised by these self-sacrificing behaviors and will later, assign meaning and

purpose to these acts. Follower will also identify their leaders and recognize them through the establishment and enunciation of a convincing vision. Identified leaders tend to show a great tendency of demonstrating collective mindset by referring to shared history, identity and interest and collective efficacy (Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993). These enunciations of visions concerning the organization's projection of plan will create a sense of collective interest (Conger, 1999). An objective vision that is accepted by organizational members may influence the process of achieving it. Followers will find it easier to adapt to the vision and adjust the vision collectively.

LEADERSHIP AS A DYADIC RELATIONSHIP

More often than not, leaders make decision to satisfy the needs of the organization; be it the needs of other leaders (board members, top management, etc.) or the needs of other stakeholders (clients, shareholders). The process of leadership however, is undoubtedly the very integral part of decision making and most of the time it involves the rest of organizational members who aren't necessary leaders i.e. the followers. Followers define leaders. Without followers, leaders are insignificant. Until early 1980s, leadership has been one of the most widely researched topics in industrial and organizational psychology (Saal & Knight, 1995). Infamous theorists all agreed on one thing - leadership is the core element of organizational effectiveness. Leadership revolves around influencing others and managing organizational expectations. People who study leadership have generally taken the view that leaders are the people with the most authority, specifically the managers and supervisors (Saal & Knight, 1995).

Leadership as a dyadic relationship has emerged since 1980s (Graen et.al., 1982). The fundamental idea is that leaders influence followers and vice versa, and that the whole sense of leadership do not only rely on power definition per se but the degree of which people would want to follow. This includes followers' reactions in each decision of the leader. Dyadic relationship views leader-follower relations as the fundamental element of leadership and group effectiveness. George Graen proposed the LMX Theory and the Leader Member Exchange Model that fully supports the dyadic relationship of leaders and followers. The whole idea of this theory lies in the feelings of in-group members. In-group members have more responsibility, decision influence and higher satisfaction. LMX is predicted to be less effective when members feel that they are being treated as out-groups who are rather exclusive from the actual group. In this theory, follower reacts in vertical dyad with each follower across three phases which are role-taking, role-making and role-routinization (Graen et.al., 1982; Graen & Bien, 1995). LMX attempts to make every subordinate feel as if he or she is a part of the in-group and, by doing so, avoids the inequities and negative implications of being in an out-group (Northouse, 1997). LMX suggests that leader and follower try to develop effective connections through three phases i.e the stranger phase, the acquaintance phase and the mature partnership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to this theory, in-group usually perform higher citizenship behavior and in return, leader will grant them with more recognition. Out-group members on the other hand, usually are bound to what is asked from them, without any extra expectations. This theory treats dyadic relationship as the center of leadership development.

Transformational Leadership and Followership

Transformational approach taken by leaders signifies the focus not only on the leaders but also the followers. The relationship between these two important figures is also very much the essence of this approach. House (1971) suggested that a successful leader engages followers by matching personal and collective goals. Transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms individuals. It revolves around values, ethics and long term goals. In this approach, followers' needs are assessed, their motives are considered and they are being treated as an end, not just a mean of achieving goals. A transformational leader elevates associations that create mutual desire to achieve from both leaders and followers. On one hand, leaders will accept followers' prospects, and followers will appreciate this acceptance and will deliver the best performances and efforts.

This kind of approach is always seen as a comparison to the transactional leadership which is more common among leaders. The main difference between the two is that transactional leadership merely involves some sort of exchange between leader and follower. A common example would be a manager who evaluates his staff for a job they have done. There is a form of transaction between the two and their mutual agreement is being based on this transaction. Transactional leaders are basically transacting their deed in exchange with what the followers gave to them. These so-called-trading between superior and subordinates is seen almost in all organizations. Transformational approach on the other hand is not only influential on followers but both the leaders and followers share the same vision and collectively strives to progress and achieve higher potential. This kind of approach focuses on the connections and interactions between the two. Bass (1985) suggested that transformational leadership and transactional leadership can be viewed as a single continuum by suggesting that transformational leadership being on the left positive side of leadership approach.

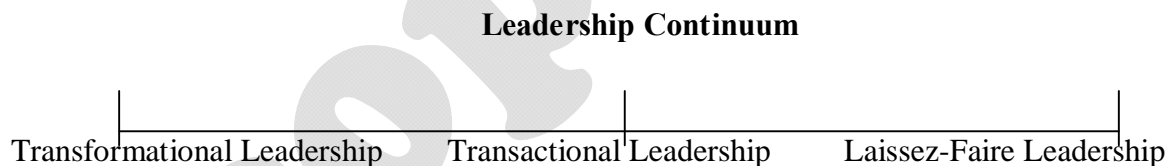


Figure : Leadership As a Single Continuum From Transformational Leadership To Laissez Faire Leadership (Northouse, 1997)

Bass and Avolio (1989) further progress with a Model of Transformational Leadership and Transactional Leadership Factors that exerts the factors that drive transformational leadership style. This model proposes four main factors that derive transformational leadership namely idealized influence (factor 1), inspirational motivation (factor 2), intellectual stimulation (factor 3) and individualized consideration (factor 4). These four factors are further recapitulated in the table below.

Factor 1 Idealized Influence	Leaders are strong role model, followers idolized them. Leaders are always counted to do the right thing. Also known as charisma. Leaders are respected, trustworthy, visionary and have high moral standards. They are able to create amusement in followers that can transform.
Factor 2 Inspirational Motivation	Leaders inspire and motivate, they expect high from followers. Leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to generate group effort. Team spirit is always encouraged.
Factor 3 Intellectual Stimulation	Leaders challenge and stimulate followers' capability. Followers are always promoted to be better. Followers are supported when being initiative, and they are often empowered to think extraordinarily.
Factor 4 Individualized Consideration	Leaders are good listeners, mentors and coaches. Leaders are always finding ways to help followers overcome challenges. They care for followers and always tend to create mutual vision. They accept insights and open to opposing views.

Followers' Attributions

Followers' attributions to leaders' behavior affect the acceptance of leadership in groups, thus determine the overall achievement of organizational goals. For the purpose of this review, followers' attributions will focus on two main ideas proposed by Robert Kelly (1992) and Ira Chaleff (1995).

Robert Kelly (1992) proposed the Kelley's follower Typology in which he identified five different follower styles. The typology is as follows:

Alienated	Deep independent thinkers who do not willingly commit to a leader. They have knowledge, skills and capabilities but focus totally on the weaknesses of the organization and other people.
Passive	Do as they are told, do not think critically, they are not active. They will not take obligations or initiative. Passive followers allow decision and consideration to their superior.
Conformist	More participative than passive followers but do not provide challenge. Conformists often participate actively but do not utilize critical thinking. They accomplish task eagerly without considering the nature of job and assignment.
Pragmatic	Middling in their independence, engagement and general contribution. They have the quality of all four extremes attributions, depending on which style fits the prevalent situation. Pragmatic followers will use any style which benefits their position and reduce risks. They usually appear when difficulty arises and will do anything to help.
Exemplary/Effective	Idyllic in almost all ways, excelling at all tasks, engaging strongly with the group, offer intellectual yet receptive support and confront to their leader. These followers are important, independent and energetic; they will take risk when required.

Source: Kelley (1992), Fujita et. al. (2009)

Kelley's followers' typology tells us several important things. One; followers have their own mind. They can form a group of their own and in fact, become a leader themselves if they want to. Followers are not merely horsemen, they make decisions, and they implement instructions. And sometimes, followers guide leaders from falling out of control. Two; there is such thing as a good follower. Kelley named exemplary follower to be the best of all, possessing the other four extreme attributions quite moderately. Exemplary followers are also the brains and the knowledge champions of the organization, and these are the tacit skills that we would want to keep safe. Three; there is that kind of follower that we want to avoid. Every leader wants a follower who is effective and not a burden. To achieve organizational goals, we all demand followers to be ideal and efficient. However Kelley warns us that followers are also human, and some of them are not as efficient. These kinds of followers are either to be trained and nurtured or to be avoided totally.

Ira Chaleff provides followers' classification based on the extent to which they support leaders as opposed to how much they challenged them. Good followership is a skill that requires courage (Chaleff, 1995). Chaleff's classification is as follows:

Implementer	Majority of followers, take orders and complete them, with no questions asked.
Partners	Like to be treated as equals to the leader, although they respect the leader's position. Partners are strong supporters but will provide intelligent challenge when necessary.
Individualists	They are not easy followers, think for themselves, often as they want.
Resource	Do what is requested, and always a little more. They are blindly obedient, not so much intelligence and lack courage to provide challenge.

Source: Chaleff, 1995.

Unlike Kelley who looks at followers' attribution to categorize them, Chaleff puts followers in their own class by looking at the inclination of support that the followers give to their leaders. Some followers are good implementers; they finish each task assigned to them with no questions asked. Some of them are individualists, somewhat hard to follow orders, often causing conflicts. Some followers are very effective they provide challenge to leaders, and often put leaders in an alarmed mode as they know they are being watched by their subordinates. Chaleff's taxonomy of followers' dimension could be seen like a continuum ranging from a difficult type of follower (individualists) up to the most effective type (partners), with implementers and resource being in the middle.

MALAYSIAN FOLLOWERSHIP: THE NEW LEADERSHIP

Kenji Fujita, Listyoko Wisnu Aji and Win Aung Kyaw (2009) from International University of Japan in their research entitled "*Primary Study of Leader and Follower Relationship in Asia: Empirical Study on Managers in Asian Countries*" provided us with some interesting result to start off: Malaysian (organization) followers lack empowerment. Empowerment factor between Malaysia and other four Asian countries in their research showed

an impressive significance difference. One of their assumptions is the impact of Malaysian culture on managerial influence. Malaysia has been recognized as a country that puts emphasis on hierarchy and enforcement of protocol in which these factors could have influence the degree of empowerment given to followers. Their result asserts us that Malaysian followers are still in need of a lot of improvement. Malaysian leaders are significant, more and more global organizations emerge over the years, but attention is now vital to be given to the followers. This research also confirmed that leader and follower relationships affect followers' satisfaction in organization.

Followers' preferences in their leaders are also a factor in ensuring organizational effectiveness. Syed Azizi Wafa and Shanmugam Arumugam (n.d) in their study "Subordinates' Preference in Leadership Behavior: Expatriate or Local Bosses- The Case of Malaysia" found out that local bosses are further away from the characteristics of an ideal boss as compared to an expatriate boss. In their study, Malaysian subordinate managers perceived expatriate bosses are in an idyllic figure than local superiors. Their study affirms that nationality of superiors does matter, in which Japanese bosses are at the top of the chart followed by Americans, with Malaysian bosses in the middle.

Hairuddin Ali (2007) in his study of followership among Malaysian teachers reported that 87.7% (out of 406 teachers) are "survivors/pragmatists" as coined by Kelley (1992). These followers are moderate followers; they are situational and fit in where necessary. Exemplary followers however are found to be just 9.9% among the rest, and they are truly an asset of good quality and skills.

Malaysia possesses defined leaders, some may say. But politically and organizationally speaking, Malaysian followers need to be pushed a little further. In order to shine more in the globalized world, Malaysian organizations need to revolutionize these "blind" followers to become more participative and outstanding. The Global Competitiveness Index 2009-2010 reported that Malaysia has dropped three ranks from 2008-2009, to ranking 24 from 21. This downfall is urged to have been an impact of the current economic crisis that affected the global economy. Klaus Martin Schwab, the founder of World Economic Forum suggested that it is important that countries put into place strong organizational fundamentals to further blossom economic growth (Elliot, 2009). Physically powerful followership could be one of the answers to these strong fundamentals.

CONCLUSION

Subordinates are an integral part of an organization, Malaysian or not. They are followers and a citizen themselves. Being an efficient subordinate shows loyalty and commitment, and is a sign of healthy personal development. Followers are not always followers, they are also potential leaders. And in some situations, they are also leaders. This paper encapsulates the most common argument on leader-follower dynamics. Courageous followers add meaning to organizations and they are the most important part of getting things done. The key to personal balance for leaders is the quality of their relationship with followers (Chaleff, 2003).

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