LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

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Abstract

This research paper tries to probe into the matter that who matters more? Leaders or Followers. In this the old concept was that the leaders matter a lot and followers don't at all. Leaders run the organizations and considers as Drivers. But in this dynamic world, the line of distinction between leaders and followers is thinning. It is far overdue that leaders understand the importance of followers and try to understand them better.

Keywords: Leaders, Followers, The Sheep, The Yes People, The Alienated Followers The Survivors, The Effective Followers- Conformist Followers, Pragmatic Followers- Passive Followers, Levels of Engagement, Critical Thinking Skills, Impact on Organizational Effectiveness
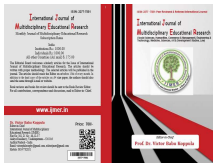
INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a concept which was initially leader centric but over the years has evolved to emphasise equally on the importance of followers. This industry was based on the proposition that the leaders matter a lot and the followers don't at all, something which is now seeming to revolve. You cannot be a leader without having followers as followership matters more. For someone to have a followership it is very important to resonate with their followers to know where they are coming from. Vision is also an important factor to have followership. It is important to have people who would follow the leader in his journey. The work of the leader is to run the organization, "the leader drives the train and the followers are on the train with him".

Leadership, as a concept, is difficult to be put into a box as its mainly a power-based relationship between leaders and their followers. In this dynamic world, the line of distinction between leaders and followers is thinning. Flatter, networked organizations and cross cutting teams of knowledge makes it difficult to determine who is exactly following and how leadership works. A lot of changes determine how to followers respond to their "bosses" and recent changes have influenced the possible change in their behavior. It is far overdue that leaders understand the importance of their followers and try to understand them better.

Review of Literature / Work Cited

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Objectives of the study

1. To understand the interdependent relation of leaders and followers
2. To understand the growing importance of followers.
3. To provide productive environment which helps to foster growth and collaborations and help achieve shared goals

Research Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research methodology was employed to investigate the impact of Leaders and Followers   in any organisations and to examine the interdependence of both. An in-depth study was done from various journals, articles, reviews etc. regarding the importance and interdependence of leaders and followers.

Findings

Zalenick's Classification of Followers

Zalenick proposed a framework that categorizes followers into five distinct types based on levels of commitment, engagement and proactiveness in an organizational context.

The Sheep -The followers categorized as sheep are often seen as ones who conform to the norms and expectations set by the leader of the organization. They are often characterized by their docile and complying nature. They usually lack initiative and prefer to follow instructions rather than taking a more hands-on role in running the organization.

The Yes People- Followers categorized as the "yes people" avoid conflicts and do not voice out their opinions. They always tend to agree with the superior's opinions without critically evaluating them. These followers focus on maintaining harmony and constantly look for their bosses' approval. While "yes people" may seem to be supportive they lack independent thoughts and opinions.

The Alienated Followers- These followers usually don't show full support to their superiors. They might have feelings of resentment, exhibit passive aggressive behavior and not always be committed to their work.

The Survivors- They are pragmatic and self- thriving followers who easily and quickly adapt to the organization and its environment to ensure their benefits and survival. They navigate through the hierarchy, unsaid rules to protect their interests and ensure advancement of their careers. They are usually opportunistic, selfish as they might keep personal gains and interest before the organization's. So, its seen often that they are not loyal.

The Effective Followers- They are proactive, independent and critical thinkers who contribute largely to the success of an organization. They are committed towards their leader and the organization, view goals as common targets and not afraid to voice out their opinions. They often serve as assets towards an organization's success thus helping in improving the problem-solving process, coming up with innovative ideas etc.

Robert E. Kelley's Typology of Followership

Robert E. Kelley introduced a framework where he categorized followers into five types based on their engagement and critical thinking skills (Novikov, 2016). He mentioned the same in his book "The Power of Followership" How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow." This typology of followership helps to emphasize on the importance of understanding the diverse roles that followers take up in any organization. If a leader is able to recognize these differences, then he can tailor his leadership accordingly and achieve the best results. This approach will also help in actively engaging and empowering their followers thus ensuring an organization's success.

Alienated Followers- These followers can be characterized by their low engagement within the organization and critical thinking capacity. They can often feel disconnected from their leader, organization and common goals. They are passive aggressive, lack the proper motivation and enthusiasm needed towards their job. They harbor feelings of resentment.

Conformist Followers – Unlike alienated followers, these are highly engaged with their organization. As they lack high critical thinking, they will readily follow the instructions given by their boss without questioning or opposing them. It's in their nature to prioritize harmony among the people and ensure all of them conform rather than keeping their personal interest above the company's.

Pragmatic Followers-Pragmatic followers are more practical, they are moderately engaged and have good critical thinking abilities. They are highly engaged with their leader, support common interests but also have the ability to raise concerns if they have any. They are practical, can easily adapt to changing situations and navigate through organizational hierarchies to maintain their position and protect their own interests.

Passive Followers- As suggested by their name, they exhibit low levels of engagement and do not have very sharp critical thinking skills. They simply follow their leader and are known to not take much initiatives and interest in their work. Due to their less involvement in the organization, they lack proper motivation and do no actively contribute towards the organization's success and fulfillment of goals.

Exemplary Followers- They are valuable to their organization. Exemplary followers are highly engaged with the organization and their leaders while having high critical thinking skills. They also possess high commitment levels and are actively involved with the activities of their organization. Their involvement also helps in achieving success. They provide constructive criticism and feedback, have innovative ideas to contribute and often also help with providing alternative solutions to preexisting problems. All of this further helps to improve an organization's adaptability and effectiveness.

Ira Chaleff's Typology of Followership

Chaleff's theory, as mentioned in his book, "The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and For Our Leaders", distinguishes people on the basis on assertiveness and engagement levels (Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, & Thweatt, n.d.). His framework helps to provide insights into different and varied roles and behavior that followers exhibit within an organization. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the assertiveness and engagement that follower's exhibit during their interactions. By recognizing these differences, a leader can then leverage to use this information for making better leadership decisions and ensure better results.

The Sheep – All passive and compliant followers can be termed as 'the sheep." They often blindly follow their leaders and their decisions without doubting it. They prioritize obedience and conformity over independent thoughts. They usually lack initiative, hardly challenge the authority and do not voice out opposing views, if they have any.

Yes- People – These followers are people followers and are always eager to impress their leaders. To maintain this reputation, they avoid conflicts at all costs and tend to agree with their followers at all times. Their priority is to maintain harmony and get their leader's approval and they choose to do so over expressing their opposing thoughts and views.

Survivors- Survivors are more pragmatic and adaptable who can easily adjust in the organization's environment to ensure their own survival. They navigate and understand the company's dynamics and politics and take steps that will best ensure their position in the organization. They are usually opportunistic and prioritizes their personal gain over the organization's interests.

Effective Followers – Effective followers are highly engaged; they possess high critical thinking skills and are very proactive within the organization. They actively work towards achieving success for the organization and at the same time are not

afraid to challenge the status quo. They help in providing constructive feedback, come up with alternative perspectives and help solve a problem better. All of this helps to improve an organization's adaptability and effectiveness.

Courageous Followers - Courageous followers of an organization are the ones that are assertive, independent thinkers and do not step away from challenging authority when they feel it's for the greater good of the organization. They have the ability to exhibit high engagement and critical thinking skills further contributing towards the success of their organization. They help to hold leaders accountable for their actions, they demonstrate integrity and courage and are not afraid to stand up to their leaders if they feel its right to do so.

All the above-mentioned theories share fundamental similarities in the way they have conceptualized followership and how doing so will help the leaders understand their followers better. These frameworks provide valuable insights to leaders which help them take better decisions and engage with their followers effectively.

Recognition of Diversity- Zalenick, Kelley and Chaleff, all three acknowledged that diversity exists among all the followers. They realized that followers will never be homogenous and will always exhibit varied traits, behavior and beliefs that will differentiate one from the another.

Levels of Engagement – Each classification of followers has talked about the level of engagement that followers choose to exhibit in their respective organizations. Whether they are submissive, passive or show active participation, they all acknowledged that followers will always vary when it comes to their involvement in the organization and how much commitment they wish to have towards their leaders.

Critical Thinking Skills – In all three typologies, critical thinking has been emphasized upon. For a leader to succeed, his followership should have a certain level of critical thinking capacity. They realized that followers are not just passive receivers of orders but are also capable of functioning independently. So, followers become even more effective when they express their own thoughts and contribute towards decision making. It's important to differentiate between the followers who can do so and who cannot.

Interaction with Leadership – Each classification system has paid attention on how followers choose to interact with their leaders. They either comply with their leaders, align with their thoughts or choose to constructively challenge them. Understanding how followers choose to interact with their leaders is important to explore the dynamics of a leader-follower relationship.

Impact on Organizational Effectiveness – All three have highlighted the position that followers hold in ensuring organizational effectiveness. They realized than an organization runs smoothly because of its followers. So, every framework has talked about the importance of followers, the impact that they have on the effectiveness and success of an organization. Understanding this dynamic is essential to understand the concept of effective leadership.

While they have used different terminologies for their theories, the crux however remains the same that all the theories share fundamental similarities when they conceptualize the meaning behinds followership.

We can say a leader is someone, who essentially leads and is not dependent on others, specifically his followers. "He knows the way, goes the way and shows the way." They have independent decision-making capabilities, ability to motivate others towards achieving a common goal (Barney, 2023). He will not choose to respond to negativity and will always filter out things to ensure that they reach the subordinates in a simpler way. Good leadership will help to convert visions into reality. The concept of leadership is something which is ever evolving and is something you do, not something you are (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

On the other hand, A follower is someone who does not possess these qualities and serves his leader with discipline. He obeys commands, abides by the rules without much intellectual interference. Someone who is a follower can be viewed as

someone who doesn't have authority and will only support the leader's goals and directions. They play a crucial part when it comes to assisting in the execution of plans and providing constructive criticism. However, being a follower is not a bad thing. Leaders cannot lead without having people to follow them. Leaders need their followers to achieve their goals. In certain circumstances, have good followership is what made some leaders effective. No one can effectively lead people if he doesn't know how to effectively follow people first.

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Conclusion

To conclude, leadership and followership are two interdependent roles that are important for the success of any organization. It was always believed that leaders are responsible for an organization achieving its goals, but now we can say followers are equally important. Without followers, no leaders can achieve his goals. So, it's highly critical to appreciate and understand the importance of both positions and to comprehend their interdependent relationship. By embracing the distinct characteristics of both leaders and followers, one can contribute towards creating a productive environment which help to foster growth and collaborations and help achieve shared goals.

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