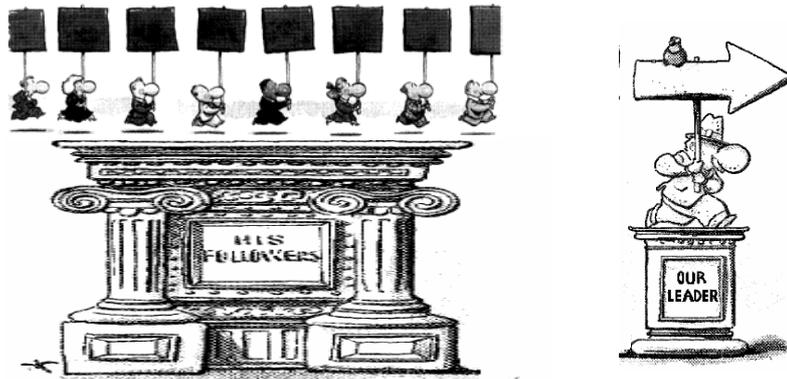


# **Understanding your Leader**

## **The Art of Followership**



Drawings by Michael White (Kelley 1996)

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## **Abstract**

Although an inexhaustible interest in leadership research continues to escalate, one area of study that has been consistently neglected is followership.

Drawing from a wide range of relevant literature, this thesis builds a case for Followership using theory and research from the leadership field, the current contribution to the followership field and from other relevant literature, proposing a Followership Process Model that illustrates how all this information can, and should, be used as a resource to be employed in determining the most appropriate followership strategy to use with a particular leader in a given situation.

The Art of Followership is based on the fundamental criterion of understanding and various models and theories regarding followership, interpersonal skills, communication and other related topics are used to illustrate the existence of a conceptual map that can be developed and used by followers to facilitate diagnosis of social interaction and supply an agenda for action by offering possibilities on the most effective behaviour that will facilitate their relationships with current and future leaders.

Within the Art of Followership it is argued that in order for subordinates to meet their leader's expectations, the subordinates need to develop three critical aptitudes; (1) Awareness and Understanding, (2) Willingness and Problem-responsibility, and (3) Utilization Capability.

Further research is recommended to determine the specific nature and variables affecting the quality of leader-follower relationships and how followers determine the best course of behavioral action to 'survive' at work.

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis; to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis; and where based on joint research or publications, discloses the relative contributions of the respective workers or authors.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
IRIS DIETNER

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## 1.0 Introduction

*“The essence of leadership is followership”*

*(Bjerke 1999, p.66)*

*“Leaders cannot exist without followers”*

*(Prewitt 2003, p.58)*

*We fulfil both the role of leader and follower simultaneously.*

*(Latour & Rast 2004; Lundin & Lancaster 1990; Kelley 1998)*

An increasing awareness of followers and followership has led contemporary researchers to include in their work, if not focus on, the vital role of followers within business and society (e.g. Lundin & Lancaster 1990). An extensive literature review, however, has revealed that this attention is almost exclusively from a leadership perspective, which is either based on the belief that leaders need to understand their followers in order to be effective (Densten & Gray 2001; Latour & Rast 2004), or that good followership is a prerequisite to good leadership (Kleinsmith & Everts-Rogers 2000; Litzinger & Schaefer 1982).

The review of the literature uncovered an opportunity and a need for an expository thesis exploring the importance of followership awareness and the development of followers.

While the initial belief was based on the importance of understanding being essential in order to improve a relationship between leader and follower, the literature review uncovered that the need to understand further required the necessary ingredients of motivation and ability to utilise that understanding.

In practical terms, followers would benefit from understanding the behaviour of their leaders in order to select the most appropriate followership behaviours to facilitate the working relationship just as has been suggested

that leaders need to understand followership behaviour. The importance of these leader-follower dyadic relationships for organizational learning has been recognized, although to date it has been from a leadership perspective advising greater follower focus to advance leadership theory and research (Densten & Gray 2001).

Drawing from a wide range of relevant literature, this thesis builds a case for Followership using theory and research from the leadership field, psychology research, organizational studies, philosophy, linguistics and more. Throughout all these studies, one main assumption remains constant, either specifically or implicitly, and that is the need for understanding

## **2.0 Definitions**

The idea of leadership seems solid; it being a capacity to lead. It is not until we explore how leaders act that we realise there are difficulties in 'concretising' a process for leadership. What constitutes as a leader for one person, may not do so for another. Authors have tended to idealise the intent of leadership and encapsulate it into their definitions. While a search to find cause and effect attributes that lead to successful leadership is a very valid undertaking, it will ever be flawed at the onset if the core concept of leadership itself is not determined.

People's perceptions of leadership are conditioned by personal and cultural schema, which operate at a subconscious level. This is why most people may not be able to articulate a coherent or precise definition of leadership but are nevertheless confident they can recognise it when they see it. However, while these perceptions remain unclarified, there will remain great variation of the cognitive schema for leadership amongst people with the potential to colour and bias the assessment of leader recognition (Wenck 1991).

In what was one of the most comprehensive meta-studies of leadership in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Ralph Stogdill reviewed and analysed over 3000 research studies in the 1960s discovering, among other things, that "there are almost

as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (Bass & Stogdill 1981). Almost four decades later contemporary theoreticians are no closer to reaching a consensus.

A database search of the term ‘leadership’ shows many authors use an adjective as a defining feature. There are Spiritual Leaders, Autocratic Leaders, Democratic Leaders, Charismatic Leaders, Ferocious Leaders, Immoral Leaders, Narcissistic Leaders, Unsuccessful leaders, and the list goes on. This need for ‘adjectivising’ leadership illustrates the lack of unanimity amongst practitioners and academics alike.

Incorporating ‘success’ into the very classification of leadership is quite common in literature, however, Wenek (1991) finds this shift of attention from influence as the essence of leadership to outcomes very troublesome stating that “Leadership cannot be inferred from results alone. Results should enter the discussion only when distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful leadership”. Clearly this makes the outcome of leadership outside its classification, for the act of “leadership must be attempted before it can be judged successful or unsuccessful” (Bass & Stogdill 1981).

The contention here is that at it’s very core, to Lead is to Provide Direction. This will be elaborated on later in the piece but for the purpose of analysing the extensive literature on related concepts of followership, the initial focus will be leadership and followership within the workforce, with the definition expanded, without attaching any value judgments as to whether it is good or bad, effective or ineffective so that :

*a formal leader within an organisation is any employee that has been given formal authority to direct one or more subordinates.*

Here there is no distinction between a CEO as leader and the Manager that has a single subordinate reporting to them. Both, for the purpose of this study, are considered leaders due to their job requiring them to lead – provide direction – to a subordinate.

Equally, the definition for followers is considered here to be based on the core principle that to Follow is in fact to Respond to given Direction. Therefore:

*A formal follower within an organisation is any employee that is a subordinate i.e. formally reports to somebody higher in the organisational hierarchy.*

These two definitions may seem simplistic considering the depth of other definitions given in previous studies, however, this thesis is not about arguing the nature of Leadership and Followership, although this will be explored, nor is it about putting forth a universal definition for the terms. The practical focus of this thesis requires practical definitions that are not encumbered with philosophical and metaphorical restrictions. Confining this study to the relationships between employees and their boss gives this thesis structure and boundaries that can then be further extended once the foundation has been explored and brought back to its core.

One particular controversy that must be acknowledged here is the on-going debate on whether there is a distinction between a 'leader' and a 'manager'. Many argue that the two are in no way synonymous and entire articles are dedicated to outlining the different characteristics of each (e.g. Anderson 2005; Colvard 2003; Maccoby 2000; Manikutty 2003). However, many researchers discussing management, leadership or followership continually use the two terms interchangeably (e.g. Dixon & Westbrook 2003; Holliday 2004; Kelley 1998; Setichik 1997; Steger et al.1982). There is also the perspective that leadership is but one of several role aspects of a manager's role (Mintzberg 1994; Wenek 2003) whereby management refers to the classic functions of planning, leading, organising, and controlling at both the work unit and broader organisational levels (Sims 2002).

Another possibility put forth here is that the reason for contention between defining a leader and manager is due to the 'Great Man' connotations still attached to the concept of leader that calls to mind for many people an ideal. The role of manager, often bearing predominantly administrative responsibilities, is considered far too ordinary to be something as special, as

heroic and exceptional as a Leader. What emerges is, in the words of Wenek (2003), a series of “ad hominem attributions is an image of leaders as knights of high purpose and managers as bean-counting clods”(p.27). As noted by Yukl (2002), however, "associating leading and managing with different types of people is not supported by empirical research; people do not sort neatly into these extreme stereotypes and some management theorists have recanted such views" (p.5), for example, John Kotter, a Harvard Business professor with twenty-five years of leadership training experience and author of numerous articles and texts, has admitted he is guilty of erroneously using this leader/manager dichotomy in the interests of simplicity (Blagg & Young 2001).

Merriam-Webster dictionary (2005) defines a ‘leader’ as “a person who leads; who has commanding authority or influence”, and a ‘manager’ as “one that manages; a person who directs a team”. While these definitions lack the depth and grandeur of their more marketable counterparts, considering that the focus of this review is on examining the relationship between employees and who they report to, terminology such as Leader-Follower, Manager-Subordinate, Supervisor-Supervisee will be used interchangeably. The aim is to avoid getting embroiled in semantics.

### **3.0 Why an Art of Followership?**

We are all likely at some point in our career to find ourselves working for someone who just doesn’t complement our working ‘style’. Perhaps a superior who appears to speak a different language when you converse with them, or perhaps you have a high interpersonal relationship need and you are stuck working for a boss who only cares about the bottom line results of your work and doesn’t even know your name. Alternatively your boss may have a high interpersonal relationship need or a micro-managing nature and all you is to be left alone to do your job. In such a difficult working relationship, what course is available for the subordinate to take? And why should the subordinate do anything at all considering leaders are supposedly trained

and, many would say, *required* to effectively manage the quality of their relationships with subordinates.

The problem is that managers are *not* always the epitome of leadership or, as Kelley (1998) puts it; “Bosses are not necessarily good leaders: subordinates are not necessarily effective followers. Many bosses couldn’t lead a horse to water. Many subordinates couldn’t follow a parade”. The popular humorist, Scott Adams (1996), also made note of this phenomenon and has become very famous, while making a considerable profit, for his presentation of the numerous idiosyncrasies found in management practice within organisations today.

Adam’s Book, *The Dilbert Principle*, is claimed by one Wall Street Journal reviewer as ‘the best management book I have ever read’ while the Washington Times called it “the management book of the century” (Adams 1996). Management guru Michael Hammer comments that the book “provides the best window into the reality of corporate life that I’ve ever seen” while The Tampa Tribune (1996) simply states “Ye who seek managerial enlightenment: Worship not at the feet of Peter Drucker: Forsake the search for excellence. Turn thy head from quality circles. Dilbert is the new management messiah”.

So what is The Dilbert Principle and why has it taken the world by storm?

The concept underlying the Dilbert Principle is that "The most ineffective workers are systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage: management." This has been claimed as successor to the Peter Principle, which originally stated that “everyone rises to his level of incompetence” (Peter & Hull 1969). To elaborate, the Peter Principle was said to occur due to the following progression; when an employee, having been hired into some entry-level role, does his job very well, he is promoted. If he fulfils his new function with skill, he is promoted again. This process continues until the employee has risen into a position where he can no longer properly achieve his responsibilities, and there stagnates for the remainder of his career.

To Adams, the Peter Principle days were "Golden Years when you had a boss who was once good at something. . . Now, apparently, the incompetent workers are promoted directly to management without ever passing through the temporary competence stage" (Adams 1996, p.12).

Kessler (2001) suggests that while Adams effectively, not to mention profitably, illustrates the Dilbert Principle, he should perhaps attend more to the academic pursuit of tracing the root source(s) of people's idiocy so that it can be better understood, or even, the practical alternative, reduced through effective management practices. However, Adams may find the idea of more managerial training to wipe out the Dilbert phenomenon highly ironic.

The world of Dilbert clearly shows how ineffective managers can be in their leadership and this is despite receiving extensive training. To then suggest that what is required is more leadership training highlights the shared assumption that such organizational problems can and should always be solved by leaders themselves. Gabarro & Kotter (2005) observed that "many [followers] assume that the boss will magically know what information or help their subordinates need and provide it to them" and while "certainly, some bosses do an excellent job of caring for their subordinates in this way, for a [follower] to expect that from all bosses is dangerously unrealistic" (p.95).

Followers are not merely the objects of leadership and it is necessary to move away from this preoccupation with only the leadership side of the relationship. Goffee and Jones (2001) accused mainstream leadership approaches of portraying followers as "empty vessels waiting to be led, or even transformed, by the leader" (p.148) as researchers seek to render leadership a prescriptive endeavour (Collinson 2005).

This tendency to separate 'leaders' from 'followers' and privilege the former as the primary agent in relationship dynamics, has remained prevalent throughout the literature reviewed. However, awareness is growing and the dualistic assumptions in leadership literature are now beginning to attract some scrutiny. For example, Gronn (2002) criticizes the leader-follower binaries that remain 'sacrosanct' within leadership studies, advocating the

importance of distributed leadership where the emphasis is on interdependence, coordination and reciprocal influence between leaders and followers.

Ray, Clegg & Gordon (in Storey 2004) have been noted for their criticism of traditional studies, which portray the leadership relationship as an unremarkable dualism while Prince (2005) argues that this subject-object dichotomy artificially divorces 'leaders' from 'followers', presenting the former as powerful subjects and the latter as passive objects.

Collinson (2005) suggests that this dualistic understanding of subject-object separation is embodied in the language itself wherein "complex relations and interwoven processes are reduced to overly simplified binary oppositions...[that are] reified as seemingly concrete, independent and ontological 'representations of reality', whilst interrelations and asymmetries are denied or underestimated" (p.1421).

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) more explicitly addresses the relationship between a leader and follower emphasizing that both mutually determine the quality of the relationship, which has generally been found to be positively related to job performance and job attitudes (Collinson 2005; (Janssen & Van Yperen 2004).

Maslun and Uhl Bien (2001) found in their study that individuals in low LMX relationships wanted better quality and believed that they tried by the relationships just didn't work (p.704). Although more empirical research is needed, the implications regarding accountability in low quality relationships is significant, especially considering the managers in Maslyn and Uhl-Bein's study were the ones who reported greater overall effort by themselves than they reported for their subordinates.

The importance attributed to leadership was graphically conceptualised during the 'Great man' era, which depicted a leader as hero, a saviour, wise and courageous and in all ways superior. While in the modern day business world one may be hard pressed to find many leaders that impress quite so favourable an image to their followers, the belief that it is in fact the duty of

every leader to aspire to such standards undoubtedly remains a well embedded ideal still salient in society's perception of leadership.

Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich (1985) conducted an extensive research program examining leadership literature and empirical studies, questioning the widely held assumption that leadership is the most important factor in organizational functioning. Developing a new perspective entitled the Romance of Leadership, their study revealed that leaders and leadership issues remain the favoured explanations for various events in and around organisations. Subsequent research has also shown that people value performance results more highly when those results are attributed to leadership and that a halo effect exists for leadership attributes (Kramer & Messick 2005).

More recently the Charismatic Leadership theories have been accused of promoting a "heroic leadership" stereotype (Beyer 1999; Howell & Shamir 2005; Yukl 1999), depicting leaders as heroes who single handedly determine the success of groups and organisations (Howell & Shamir 2005).

While a leader's contribution can indeed be significant, Nirenberg (2001) reminds us "their successes are intimately related to the cooperation and hard work of a small army of colleagues, peers, 'bosses', 'subordinates', mentors, and customers combined with good fortune" and that while possibly a suitable symbol, "the icons we so frequently read about are really only an easy shorthand for a description of the work of innumerable individuals who made success happen" (p.4).

In Nirenberg's article, 'Leadership: a practitioner's perspective on the literature', a brief description of the polarities among observers of leadership is provided based on two books that profiled the success of two men; Al Dunlap, the no-nonsense turnaround specialist and Herb Kelleher, people-orientated founding CEO of Southwest Airlines (Nirenberg 2001, p.5).

Al Dunlap was shown as the leader who measures success in terms of rising stock prices, dividends and profit, an indication of economic success. In contrast to Dunlap's profit-centred line of attack, Kelleher was an example of

a people-centred approach whereby he wanted to create an organizational culture that enables, empowers, encourages and ennoble each employee (Nirenberg 2001).

In 1997 Dunlop published his own book in which he gives an account of his turnaround of Scott paper where he eliminated more than 11,200 jobs and increased Stockholder value by US\$6.5 billion, all within 2 years of being appointed CEO. This penchant for drastically downsizing firms and selling off assets has left Dunlap with the nickname of “Chainsaw Al”. While his methods continue to be criticized by leadership theorists, when the criteria of effectiveness is profit, stockholder value and survival, Al Dunlap fit the bill at Scott Paper and on becoming the new CEO at Sunbeam Corporation the stock shot up 50% within a day (Nirenberg 2001).

Having established that not all leaders behave in the ‘ideal’ leadership way, and the popularity of Dilbert alone suggests the majority of the workforce agrees, why is this not another thesis on yet another way to develop managers/leaders, a path that Kessler (2001) suggests? The reason is that this report aims to highlight the need for developing *followers* so that they can take the initiative to manage the quality of their relationship with their manager especially in situations where confronted with ‘ineffective’ leadership.

#### **4.0 What Leadership Theory has to offer**

Although awareness and recognition of followers as an active and powerful player within the leader-follower relationship is still in its embryonic stage of theoretical development, it is believed that the extensive, empirically tested, leadership literature provides a rich and valuable foundation for the paradigm shift that is the proposed Art of Followership.

Therefore, this section summarises the four main categories to which leadership writings are generally assigned, these being; The Great Man / Trait Approach, Style/Behaviour approach, Contingency / Situation Theories, and Transactional / Transformational Leadership.

#### 4.1 Great Man / Trait Approach

The Great Man Theory emerged from the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the assertion that great men are born with inherited leadership qualities. The Great Man Theory was to provide a method to select individuals who are perceived to be great leaders with the ability to transform and inspire both individuals and organisations (Bass 1990). The theory promotes the idea that anyone in a leadership position must deserve to be there by virtue of his or her characteristics or personal traits (Chemers 1997). There remains little evidence, however, to support the claim that inherited traits are good predictors of leadership effectiveness.

The Trait Approach arose from the “Great Man” theory as a way of identifying the key characteristics of successful leaders. It was believed that through this approach critical leadership traits could be isolated and that people with such traits could then be recruited, selected, and installed into leadership positions.

Some leadership researchers (e.g., Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991) continue to believe that trait theory is deserving of more attention. McAdams (1994) believes that reliable trait ratings provide an excellent “first read” on a person “by offering estimates of a person’s relative standing on a delimited series of general and linear dimensions of proven social significance” (p.146). Speaking in support of Trait Theory, Funder (1994) states that he often runs into “a lot of non-trait psychologists who seem to regard the conceptualization and measurement of traits as a limited and archaic enterprise. What they don’t realize is that it’s an enterprise they can’t escape. ... What do people inherit if not traits, and what is the result of choosing a societal niche if not a stable pattern of behaviour, and how can you measure either of those without personality assessment?” (p.127). According to Funder, trait theorists such as himself believe “(a) thoughts and feelings are important to a large degree because of their effects on what people do and say and, (b) more fundamentally, the only way, besides ESP, to know what somebody else thinks and feels is to watch what he or she does or says” (Funder 1994, p.126).

There is no reason why trait theory should be applicable only to leadership. Just as there is a legitimate need for followers to understand those they follow, so the trait debate is relevant to conceptualising followership. Funder's contention that trait theory is evident still in current leadership theories further supports the relevance of examining this area of leadership literature as it may apply to followership.

However, as authors go beyond genetics ambiguity develops in just what is meant by the term "trait". Personality factors (Roberts & Pomerantz 2004), physical features (Takala & Aaltio 2006), intelligence measures (Humphreys 1994), and even behaviours (Caspi & Moffitt 1993) are all thrown together as traits while others argue that these are very different variables, which should not be reduced to one plane (Pervin 1994).

As such, the line between trait and behavioural theories becomes blurred. While trait theory remained set on a genetic premise the distinction was evident in that you either believed Leaders were born (trait theory) or made (behavioural theory).

#### **4.2 Style / Behaviour**

By the 1940's a decided shift towards the behavioural approach to leadership studies occurred. Since no generally acceptable model of successful traits could be derived that suited the complex combination of people and situations encountered in business (Carpenter 2005), the behaviour of leaders operating within varying situations and group dynamics replaced the traditional study of traits with the view that leaders' behaviours are susceptible to empirical identification, cataloguing and measurement. The belief was that this specifiable set of effective leadership behaviours, once identified, could be taught to others. The strength of this approach lies in the leader's ability to reflect upon their leadership in a given situation, and improve or adjust their behaviour as necessary (Northouse 2001; Spohn 2005).

This approach falls in exactly with the premise of this thesis that followers would benefit from having the ability to reflect upon their *followership* in a given situation and to then improve or adjust their behaviour as necessary.

The Behavioural or Style approach emerged from three main intellectual sources. The University of Iowa studies of the late 1930's distinguished between autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles of leadership along a single continuum whereby it was deemed that leaders could display only one style and were generally incapable of switching between styles (Lewin & Lippitt 1938).

A second major behavioural theory of leadership developed under the patronage of the University of Michigan where the relationship between supervisory behaviour and employee productivity and satisfaction was investigated (Warrick 1981). It is here that researchers first differentiated between employee-centred and production-centred leaders.

Thirdly, in the late 1940s a two dimensional approach to leadership was developed at Ohio State University, which argued that leader behaviour was reducible from 1800 behaviour descriptions to an initial 150 field research items, and ultimately to two interrelated theoretical constructs; 'Initiation of structure' and 'Consideration'. Consideration is the degree to which a leader shows concern and respect for followers, looks out for their welfare, and expresses appreciation and support (Bass 1990; Judge et al. 2004). Initiating Structure is the degree to which a leader defines and organizes his role and the roles of followers, specifies procedures, and directs followers toward task accomplishment (Chemers 1997).

The Style approach shares many of the difficulties within leadership research whereby over 120 'leadership scales' were used during the 1960-76 period alone, with only 3% used more than a few times (Schriesheim & Kerr 1977). The comparability of findings has been questioned even where the same model had been used due to alteration of measurement scales over time and among studies, for supposedly the same concepts (Tajeda et al. 2001). And so, as with traits, the style and behavioural approach has never achieved

consensus on precisely which set of behaviours (style) are crucial to leader effectiveness.

None-the-less, the plethora of studies completed in this area all provide excellent reference points for greater understanding on the leadership role and its counter part, followership.

The behavioural era of leadership produced a gallery full of detailed and colourful portraits of leaders. These painting of autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire leaders, amongst numerous others, provide a fascinating, often amusing, and undoubtedly valuable reference on leadership styles likely to be encountered in the workplace (and out), as well as giving an indication of the far reaching implications of conceptualising behavioural tendencies by leaders and non-leaders alike.

#### **4.3 Contingency / Situation**

Whilst behavioural theories may help managers develop particular leadership behaviours they give little guidance as to what constitutes effective leadership in different situations. Indeed, most researchers today conclude that no one leadership style is right for every manager under all circumstances. Instead, contingency-situational theories were developed to indicate that the style to be used is contingent upon such factors as the situation, the people, the task, the organisation, and other environmental variables. Here, once more, the transference to followership is evident. It is just as conceivable that the most effective followership style or behaviour is contingent upon factors such as situation, people (i.e. leader as well as colleagues), task, organisation and environmental variables.

The two major theories contributing towards this school of thought are Fiedler's Contingency Model and the Hersey-Blanchard Model of Leadership.

Fiedler's contingency model assumes that group performance depends on: (a) leadership styles described in terms of task and relationship motivation, and (b) situational favourableness, which is determined by leadership-member relations, the task structure, and the position of power. Fiedler

argued that leadership involves social influence and the ease with which a leader is able to influence his or her followers. Fiedler further argued that the quality of interpersonal relations between the leader and his or her follower is such that if the leader is well liked and respected by the followers his or her ability to influence them is easier and more likely to be successful (Fiedler 1967). And how successful a follower that is liked and respected by his leader!

Fiedler's contingency model further acknowledges the follower's influence on leadership whereby it specifies group atmosphere which highlights that follower characteristics such as loyalty, support, and cooperation with the leader, are important situational determinant of the effectiveness of people-oriented versus task-oriented leaders (Howell & Shamir 2005).

The Situational Leadership Model is representative of the widely accepted contingency paradigm of leadership (Bass 1990). The distinguishing assumption of the contingency paradigm of leadership is that there is no single style of leadership that is effective in all situations. Rather, to be effective, a leader must use a style or set of behaviours that fits the unique demands of the situation.

Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey created a model of situational leadership in the late 1960s that allows one to analyse the needs of the situation, then adopt the most appropriate leadership style. The leadership styles are characterised in terms of the amount of direction and support that the leader provides to his or her followers.

Blanchard & Hersey (1969) broke down leadership into four behaviour styles that depended on the amount of direction and support that the leader provides to his or her followers. These were labelled:

(S1) Directing : Low Relationship, High Task

(S2) Coaching: High Relationship, High Task

(S3) Supporting: High Relationship, Low Task

(S4) Delegating: Low Relationship, Low Task

These leader styles were also ascribed a corresponding four Development Levels based on follower maturity. These were segmented as follows:

(D1) Low Competence, High Commitment

(D2) Some Competence, Low Commitment

(D3) High Competence, Variable Commitment

(D4) High Competence, High Commitment

The contention is that no single leadership style is considered optimal. As subordinate maturity progresses from very low to moderate, the recommended leadership style shifts from a low relationship and high task style towards a higher relationship and a more moderate task style while any further maturity increases are best dealt with a low relationship and low task style (Fernandez & Vecchio 1997, p.68). Effective leaders need to be flexible and must adapt themselves according to the situation. The right leadership style will depend on the person being led – the follower. Important to note is that Blanchard & Hersey very clearly state that it is the leader who must adapt, not the follower, that the leader should be the one trained in how to operate effectively in various leadership styles, and how to determine the development level of others. Why the responsibility is left solely up to the leader is never mentioned.

Due to the different roles played by leaders and followers, one to provide direction, the other to respond to given direction, these 'recommended' leader behaviour styles are not directly transferable to potential follower behaviour styles although it would be interesting to explore the development levels as they apply to leader maturity. All in all the literature does provide insight into how different behaviours can best be applied to different development levels, which only goes to increase a follower's knowledgebase from which to draw relevant followership strategies.

Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory has been incorporated in leadership training programs representing over 400 of the Fortune 500 companies (Hersey & Blanchard 1993), yet evidence of the theory's descriptive accuracy remains sparse (Fernandez & Vecchio 1997). As is clearly the pattern in leadership theory, a lack of consensus also plagues the empirical work related to Situational Leadership theory with there being no agreement about validity (Graeff 1997), while attempts to develop alternative approaches to explain the findings generated around contingency theories have been unable to produce results that predict the pattern of data to the same extent.

Path-goal theory has also received significant attention within the contingency field the theory proposing that leaders are to choose leadership styles best suited to followers' experience, needs and skills (House 1971). This mirrors exactly the contention of this thesis which is about the appropriateness of various followership styles in response to the experience, needs and skills of the leader.

#### **4.4 Transformational / Transactional Leadership**

James MacGregor Burns, in his book 'Leadership' (1978), identified two types of political leadership: transactional and transformational. To Burns, the difference between transformational and transactional leadership is in terms of what leaders and followers offer one another. Transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focuses on higher order intrinsic needs. Transactional leaders, in contrast, focus on the proper exchange of resources. If transformational leadership results in followers identifying with the needs of the leader, the transactional leader gives followers something they want in exchange for something the leader wants (Judge & Piccolo 2004; Kuhnert & Lewis 1987).

Bernard Bass (1985), a disciple of Burns, applied these ideas to organizational management. He argued that transactional leaders "mostly consider how to marginally improve and maintain the quantity and quality of

performance, how to substitute one goal for another, or how to reduce resistance to particular actions, and how to implement decisions” (p.27), in contrast to transformational leaders who “attempt and succeed in raising colleagues, subordinates, followers, clients or constituencies to a greater awareness about the issues of consequence. This heightening of awareness requires a leader with vision, self confident, and inner strength to argue successfully for what s/he sees is right or good, not for what is popular or is acceptable according to established wisdom of the time” (Bass 1985, p.17). Bass did contest Burns on one aspect of the original transaction/transformational paradigm and that is the implication of the two types being on opposite ends of the leadership continuum (Burns 1978; Judge & Piccolo 2004). Instead, Bass argued that transformational and transactional leadership are separate concepts and that the best leaders are both transformational and transactional as “transformational leadership augments the effectiveness of transactional leadership, it does not replace transactional leadership” (Bass 1997).

Transformational leadership has also been connected to Servant Leadership with Farling, Stone and Winston (1999) comparing and contrasting Robert Greenleafs Servant Leadership perspective with Burns Transformational leadership, positing that “servant leaders are indeed transformational leaders” (p.49). A later article written by Stone, Russel, and Patterson (2004) examines the theoretical framework and characteristics of both leadership concepts to determine what similarities and differences exist. The premise therein was “that transformational leaders tend to focus more on organizational objectives while servant leaders focus more on the people who are their followers” (p.349). Stone et al. found that the two concepts have many similarities with the primary distinguishing factor being this tendency of the servant leader to focus on followers.

An observation worthy of note is that the distinctions between Transactional Leadership and Transformational Leadership have been translated by many to that between managers and leaders (Bennis 1989; Bennis & Nanus 1985; Kotter 1990; Kouzes & Posner 1995; Peters & Austin 1985; Zaleznik 1997),

the same debate simply relabelled with references being written in the form of transformational (leader) and transactional (manager) (Reinhardt 2004).

This debate is not the only theme that appears to remain constant throughout the development of leadership theory with even the recent Transformation approach continuing to focus on 'traits' such as charisma, drawing on highly gendered, heroic images of the 'great man' and viewing leaders as dynamic change agents influencing passive followers (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002; Collinson 2005; Fulop et al. 2004; Shamir et al 1993)

With or without consensus, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and studies should always be critically examined but never dismissed.

All these leadership categories, theories and models are far from an extensive list of the vast and varied contributions to leadership literature. However, it is sufficient for the purpose of highlighting the relevance that leadership research has in conceptualising the Art of Followership. Clearly the mainstream leadership theories, while producing valuable insights, continue to prioritize leaders and address followers on in relation to their susceptibility to particular leadership styles.

While leadership has been in the spotlight in theoretical discussion since the days of Aristotle, followership has not completely escaped notice and the following section explores the recent development in this field.

## **5.0 Followership So Far**

### **5.1 Two-dimensional model of follower behaviour**

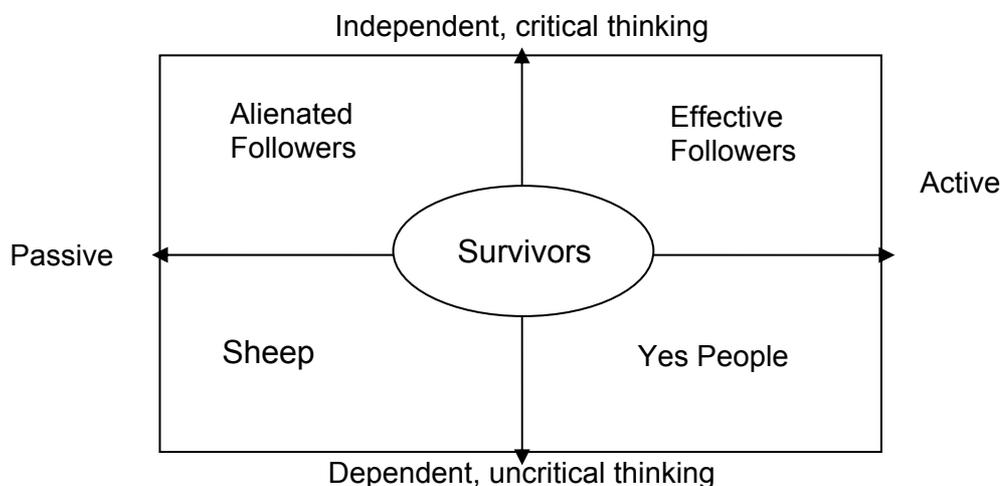
Any exploration into the realm of followership would be greatly remiss to ignore Kelley's founding contribution to the field. Robert Kelley has been proclaimed a 'prominent social scientist in followership studies' by Latour and Rast (2004) and is the most commonly cited in texts referring to followership.

In line with the conceptualisation of followership so far presented, Kelley also recognised that the glamour of the leadership role has entranced us to the

extent that “followership dominates our lives and organisations, but not our thinking” (p.143). Preoccupation with leadership has made us forget the reality that we fulfil both the role of leader and follower simultaneously (Latour & Rast 2004; Lundin & Lancaster 1990; Kelley 1998).

This call to consider the nature and importance of the follower is compelling and Kelley is not alone in its recognition, however, Kelley goes on to present the nature of a follower within a two-dimensional model of follower behaviour (Figure 1), comprising of a horizontal axis defining follower behaviour on a continuum ranging from passive to active and a vertical axis describing follower abilities that range from dependent, uncritical thinking, to independent, critical thinking. In between it includes the ineffective follower behaviours of sheep, conformist, and alienated followers (Kelley 1998).

**Figure 1. Two-Dimensional Model of Follower Behavior** (Kelley 1998)



Kelley found that followers may differ in their motivations but still perform equally well stating that even those followers driven by ambition and who do not see followership as attractive in itself, can still become “good followers if they accept the value of learning the role, studying leaders from a subordinate’s perspective, and polishing the followership skills that will always stand them in good stead” (p.143).

It is this motivational variability that led Kelley to examine the behavioural characteristics of effective and less effective following among people committed to the organisation. The Two Dimensional Model of Follower Behaviour depicts the five leadership patterns, which are characterised by Kelley as follows: “Sheep” are passive and uncritical, lacking in initiative and sense of responsibility. They perform the tasks given them and stop. “Yes People” are a livelier but equally dependent on a leader for inspiration, they can be deferential. “Alienated Followers” are critical and independent in their thinking but passive in carrying out their role. “Effective Followers” are those who think for themselves and carry out their duties and assignments with energy and assertiveness. Because they are risk takers, self-starters, and independent problem solvers, they get consistently high ratings from peers and may superiors. Effective followers are well-balanced and responsible adults who can succeed without strong leadership.

Kelley goes into great detail about the extensive qualities of effective followers building upon the aspects mentioned above to include four more essential qualities that effective followers share: (1) they manage themselves well; (2) They are committed to the organization and to a purpose, principle, or person outside themselves; (3) They build their competence and focus their efforts for maximum impact; (4) They are courageous, honest, and credible (p.144).

The qualifications do not end there however, Kelley’s Effective followers are also “credible, honest, and courageous”, establishing themselves as “independent, critical thinkers whose knowledge and judgment can be trusted” and giving “credit where credit is due, admitting mistakes and sharing successes. They form their own views and ethical standards and stand up for what they believe in” (p.146).

While Kelley’s work provides a perspective on followership as a power in organizations, gives insights on why people follow, and advises on elements associated with becoming an effective or exemplary follower, the premise is very much based on self-leadership rather than understanding the relationship between leaders and followers.

It would appear that Kelley has fallen into the Utopian trap that has claimed many a leadership theorist whereby the definitive nature underlying a concept gets lost behind far reaching ideologies. Even Kelley himself admits that the qualities he lists of effective followers “are, confusingly enough, pretty much the same qualities found in some effective leaders” (p.146). Kelley attributes this to the misleading stereotype of a leader clouding the ‘fact’ that “followership is not a person but a role, and what distinguishes followers from leaders is not intelligence or character but the role they play....Effective followers and effective leaders are often the same people playing different parts at different hours of the day” (p.146). This point has been highlighted by many authors and is in line with the contention of this thesis, as is Kelley’s statement that it would benefit followers to “compensate for ineffective leadership by exercising skill as good followers”, however, Kelley falls short by limiting the definition of how to determine effective followership by committing it entirely to the description of follower characteristics without any mention of expected results. Kelley admits that not all leaders like having self-managing subordinates preferring ‘sheep’ or ‘yes people’ and advises ‘good’ followers to protect themselves with “a little career self-management – that is, to stay attractive in the marketplace” (p.144). This contradicts his call for effective followers to show courage and stand up for their beliefs.

When discussing the definition of leadership, Wenek (1991) was quoted for his concern that the essence of leadership should not be inferred from results alone emphasising that the outcome of leadership only becomes relevant in judging success. With leadership it seems results came into the discussion too early while with followership the outcome seems not to be worth specifying at all.

Even more damaging to Kelley’s effective follower premise, not to mention other followership concepts discussed later, is Kelley’s statement that “In [his] research, [he] found that effective followers get mixed treatment. About half the time, their contributions lead to substantial rewards. The other half of the time they are punished by their superiors for exercising judgment, taking risks, and failing to conform....In practice, followers who challenge their bosses run the risk of getting fired” (p.148). How a follower could be deemed

effective when their actions lead to getting fired is not clearly covered by Kelley in his article nor by any whose work cites Kelley's. The word 'effect' is a clear reference to results and yet these are not mentioned in any definition. This is considered here a major flaw in Kelley's presentation of followership and one that seems to have been adopted (or ignored) by followership theory to date.

## **5.2 Courageous Followership**

Another perspective on followership evolves through the writings of Ira Chaleff, who presents his book *The Courageous Follower* as "a handbook for followers that they can refer to repeatedly when confronted with the challenges of supporting and, at times, correcting a leader" (Chaleff 1995, back cover).

Chaleff describes the relationship between a leader and follower where both roles have equal power as they orbit around supporting and fulfilling the organisations purpose. "When both the leader and follower are focused on the common purpose ... [the] relationship is candid, respectful, supportive and challenging ... [honouring] open communication, honesty and trust from both parties" (Lassiter 2003).

According to Chaleff, followers must understand three things in order to fully assume responsibility as followers. They must *understand* their power and how to use it, *understand* the sources of power, whom they serve and the tools available to achieve the group's mission. Followers must also *appreciate* the value of the leader and the contributions they make toward the organization's mission, understand the pressures upon the leader and learn how to minimize these and contribute to bringing out the leader's strengths for the good of the group and the common purpose. Finally, followers must work toward minimizing the pitfalls of power by helping the leader remain on track, to witness how power can corrupt and take courage to speak up.

Chaleff then further identifies what is required of followers to be an equal partner with their leader in fulfilling the purpose of the organization in his

model of the Five Dimensions of Courageous Followership (p.6), summarized as follows;

- 1) The Courage to Assume Responsibility. Courageous followers assume responsibility for themselves and the organization not expecting their leader to provide for their security and growth or give them permission to act. The courageous follower's "authority" comes from their understanding and ownership of the common purpose.
- 2) The Courage to Serve. Courageous followers are not afraid of hard work and assume additional responsibilities to unburden the leader and serve the organization standing up for the leader and the tough decisions they make. They are as passionate as the leader in pursuit of the common purpose.
- 3) The Courage to Challenge. Courageous followers give voice to the discomfort they feel when the behaviors or policies of the leader conflict with their sense of what is right and are willing to stand up, stand out, to risk rejection and to initiate conflict in order to examine the actions of the leader or group when appropriate.
- 4) The Courage to Participate in Transformation. Courageous followers champion the need for change and stay with the leader and group while they mutually struggle with the difficulty of real change. They examine their own need for transformation and become full participants in the change process as appropriate.
- 5) The Courage to Take Moral Action. Courageous followers know when it is time to take a stand that is different from the leaders. The stand may involve refusing to obey a direct order, appealing the order to the next level of authority, becoming a whistle blower or tendering one's resignation. This may involve personal risk but service to the common purpose justifies and sometimes demands such action.

Chaleff first developed his interest in Followership in response to disbelief and anger at the German peoples' followership of Adolf Hitler and the theme

on abuse of power is prevalent throughout his work portraying followers as necessary to keeping leaders on the right path (Chaleff 1995; Chaleff 2003). Followers are advised that theirs is a multifaceted role that appears to incorporate aspects such as that of nurturer, guide, teacher, challenger, moderator, investigator, diplomat, linguist, and behavioural psychologist. Chaleff has acquired many supporters with his conceptualisation of 'courageous followership' (Brusman 2003; Dixon & Westbrook 2003; Lassiter 2003). However, his expectations of followers are even grander than that of Kelley and the reasoning seems just as poorly presented. How is a follower to challenge his leader when his leader is just a follower to the leader above. Are Chaleff's courageous followers to carry entire hierarchies on their shoulder to ensure all is kept in line with *their* principles?

The Austrian writer Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach wrote over a century ago that "whenever two good people argue over principles, they are both right". Therefore, besides the obvious dilemma of both leader and follower being the same person, the judgement of whose opinion within the organisational hierarchy deserves precedence becomes moot considering "there are no ahistorical, acultural standards which would objectively determine what is good, right, or honourable" (Laitinen, 1995).

### **5.3 Followership Continuum**

Blackshear (2003) took into consideration the workings of Kelley and Chaleff, amongst others, and then went further by introducing a Followership Continuum asserting that "focusing on assessing and developing the highest followership stages of the Followership Continuum provides a diagnostic and prescriptive approach for improving workforce productivity" (p. 25). The continuum is represented by five stages of dynamic followership performance (Figure 2).

The five stages can be summarised as follows: Stage 1) Employee: simply providing work for some sort of pay. Stage 2) Committed: employee is bound to the mission, idea, organization, or has an internal pledge to an effort or



## 6.0 The Art of Followership

Clearly the literature that does focus on followers remains dominated by Kelley's (1992) original conceptualization and Chaleff's courageous model advocating self leadership and upward influence respectively. They do not cover the possibility that distinct styles of leaders may elicit the need for distinct styles of followership that are expected as responses to, and support for, particular styles of leaders.

A question that continues to elude empirical research is that if the most effective leaders are those capable of linking their leadership strategies to subordinates' followership styles as Steger and colleagues (1982) suggest, then might not the most effective followers be those capable of linking their followership strategies to their superior's leadership style?

A more comprehensive framework on followership could provide a balance to our understanding of leadership and have practical applications which could strengthen the dyadic learning relationships between leaders and followers (Densten & Gray 2001).

Many might argue that there is a reason organizations focus on leadership training, that it is simply not financially viable to train all followers as there are generally far more followers than leaders. However, as already established earlier, almost every single leader is also a follower! The hypothesis would be that if all these very same leaders that attend leadership seminars went to develop their followership skills, the resulting benefits could only help in their relationship with their subordinates too. One Dilbert strip nicely illustrates how a leader's relationship with his/her superior in turn affects their behaviour and relationship with their own subordinates.

**Figure 3. Dilbert (Adams 2003)**



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Jones and Kriflik (2006) noted this as well warning that middle and lower managers under the discipline of achieving tight performance criteria respond to such control by more stringent "micro-management of their units and subordinates" (p.156).

And so the initial definitions given earlier are now revisited and brought back to their core: To lead is to provide direction, to follow is to respond in accordance to given direction. The effectiveness depends on understanding that direction, thereby:

Effective Leaders make their directions correctly understood

Effective Followers 'correctly' (as perceived by the leader) respond to given directions.

Clearly by this line of reasoning, one cannot be an effective leader without effective followers nor can a follower be deemed effective unless their leader is effective too. All that then needs to be decided is what exactly constitutes effectiveness. The achievement of goals? Are there ethical considerations or is it based entirely on a transactional basis?

## **6.1 Hypothesis:**

**If followers were able to understand their leaders'**

- 1) Leadership Style
- 2) Expectations and Requirements

**It would increase their ability to**

- 1) Develop a Followership Style to complement their leaders' Leadership Style
- 2) Meet both leaders' expectations and requirements

**And have the effect**

- 1) Of a greater Leader-member-exchange relationship
- 2) Greater Job achievement and satisfaction

## **6.2 Model – Followership Process Model**

It has been proposed that understanding the connection between cues and personality characteristics, it is possible for employees to more accurately assess others and make adjustments to their own behaviour that will foster successful new relationships and maintain harmony in existing relationships (Bernieri & Hall 2001; Davis & Kraus 1997).

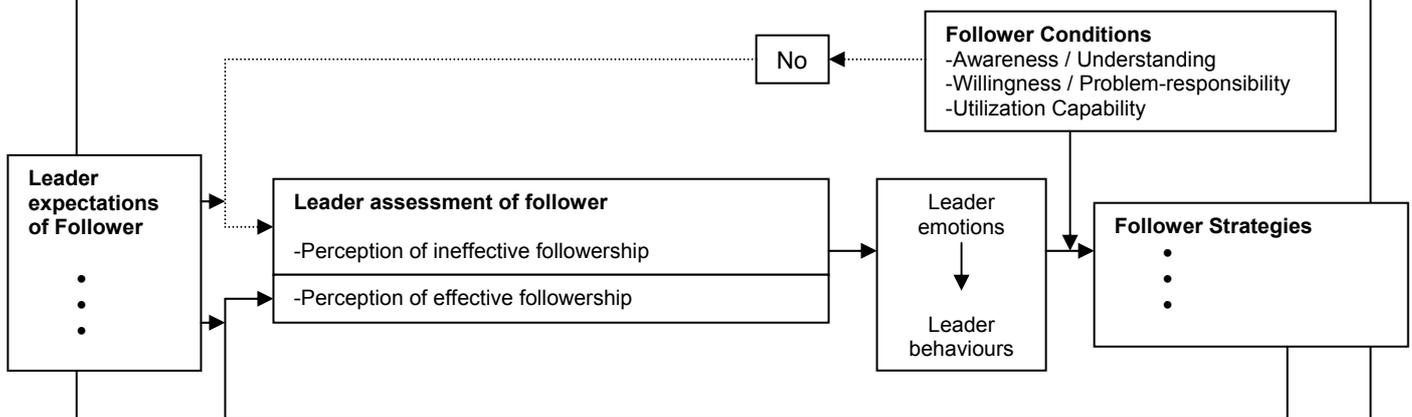
In light of this, the proposed Art of Followership has been encapsulated in a model based on the theoretical foundations laid by Jones and Kriflik (2006) in their article 'Subordinate expectations of leadership within a cleaned-up bureaucracy', and their Leadership Process Model in a Cleaned up Bureaucracy illustrated therein.



The Followership Process Model below uses the same aptitudes listed in Jones and Kriflik’s model with the contention that these Follower conditions would assist in Followers developing strategies to ensure their Leader’s assessment of them is that of ‘effective followership’. For the purpose of this model ‘effective followership’ is defined as “meeting the requirements and expectations of the leader”.

The Leader expectations and Follower strategies are not specified in the model for a reason. This thesis is to provide awareness of the rich data available for potential use in the development of followers and limiting this through labels and categorisation would inhibit the strategic applications available to followers. The strategies used by a follower will depend on the perceived expectations of the leader. A follower that understands his leader’s expectations, and has the motivation and ability to utilise that understanding, will then determine the most appropriate followership strategy that will result in the leader’s perception of effective followership.

**Figure 5. Followership Process Model**



Like any collaborative relationship, that of the leader and follower places a number of demands on both parties, but unlike a collaboration between peers, the hierarchical nature between leaders and followers involving differences in authority and status, make special demands not only on the leader and the follower, but on the relationship that binds them (Berg 1998).

There have been many attempts in the literature to conceptualize leadership in terms of relationships (Blackshear 2003; Kelley 1998; Latour & Rast 2004; Rost 1993; Setichik 1997).; for example, vertical dyadic linkage (VDL) theory (Dansereau et al. 1975; Miner 2002), which was the precursor of leader member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uh-Bien, 1995) and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). All these notions and models emerge from similar assumptions, namely that leader-follower relationships are based on exchange that is conscious and instrumental both for the leader and for the followers (Popper 2004).

Understanding leader-subordinate dyads has been found essential as they form the context for organizations; all levels of the corporate hierarchy consist of leader-subordinate relationships, forming a chain of command such that dyadic relations at one level can affect those at higher and lower levels of the organization (Lord & Maher 1993).

Research in this area tends to focus on the characteristics of leaders and followers, the interaction of these characteristics, and contextual variables (e.g. Cappelli & Sherer 1991). Absent in literature is investigation into the relative effort that individuals put into relationships with their dyad partners. Researches have yet to test issues related to social exchange in leader-member relationship, or determine factors such as whose effort is more influential in the successful development of a high-quality LMX relationship – the supervisor, the subordinate, or both? (Maslyn & Uhi-Bien 2001).

Despite the power imbalance associated with leader-member roles, influence can be exerted by both as part of social exchange (Hollander & Offermann 1990). Subordinate influence tactics have been found to influence the manager's perceptions of skills or competence (Liden et al 1993), the manager's affect for the employee (Wayne & Ferris 1990), and/or the manager's perception of similarity between the employee and manager (Engle & Ford 1997).

Cable and Judge (2003) presented a study of the relationships between personality traits and influence tactics of managers using upward influence,

examining whether the choice of influence tactic depended on the leadership style of their target (p.198). Their results suggested an important relationship between a manager's personality trait and their tendency toward certain upward influence tactics. Cable and Judge suggested managers rethink whether their use of tactic was dispositional "because behavioural tactics can be changed easier than dispositions [and] managers may benefit from greater awareness of the menu of tactics that is available to them, learning to enact more effective tactics even if it is not their initial tendency" (p.212). Importantly, their paper also showed that target leadership style is an important situational signal used in choosing influence tactics thereby showing that at least one empirical study has already taken place that clearly outlines the contention of this thesis and support for the Followership Process Model: Understanding leadership style/behaviour is crucial in establishing a repertoire of relevant influence tactics. The influence referring not to a manipulative influence of one's superior, but the influencing of the leader-member exchange relationship.

## **FOLLOWER CONDITION #1**

### **Awareness / Understanding**

To 17th century English philosopher Francis Bacon "knowledge is power" and nothing can be consistently controlled, altered, or predicted without first being understood (Kessler 2001).

The Art of Followership is based on this fundamental criterion of understanding and the plethora of models and theories available on leadership, followership, interpersonal skills, communication and other related topics all provide followers with a conceptual map that can be used to facilitate diagnosis of social interaction and supply an agenda for action by offering possibilities on the most effective behaviour that will facilitate a relationship.

It has been found that subordinates who develop an understanding of their leaders, are able to use this information in the management of their relationship, then they can “foster a mutual dependence between themselves and their supervisors (Gabarro & Kotter 1980).

While personality descriptions and leadership styles can offer insightful guidelines it is important that followers do not restrict their attention only to behaviour. Hayes (2002) warns that it is also necessary to develop metacognition skills to determine the possible consequences of personal behaviours before deciding on further action as it is “not unusual for people to develop habitual modes of relating to others that consistently yield unsatisfactory results” (Hayes 2002, p.19).

As Bernieri & Hall (2001) stress, interpersonal sensitive requires detection, decoding and comprehension for receptive accuracy; an understanding of behaviour, its expressions, its control, and interpersonal manipulation.

It has been acknowledged that the act of leadership requires people to become more open to their whole experience of interpersonal interaction - to see more, hear more, understand more (Nirenberg 2001), now it is time to recognize that this logically applies equally to Followership.

Studies have shown that subordinates can learn about, and actively engage in, communicative behaviours that positively affect the quality of LMX with their superiors. Subordinates attempt this through ingratiating activity (Giacalone & Rosenfield 1989), including opinion conformity, other enhancement, and self-presentation (Deluga & Perry 1994), by showing greater competence and performance in work/task assignments (Liden et al 1993), doing things that may increase liking and trust (Bauer & Green 1996) and utilizing impression management strategies (Giacalone & Rosenfield 1989; Wayne & Ferris 1990). Impression management is defined in the literature as the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them (Leary & Kowalski 1990; Rosenfeld et al. 1995).

An area of research that contributes towards this topic in particular is that of informal influence, which usually occurs at the follower's initiative as it requires no formal authority. In keeping with an increasing trend toward focusing on the duality of good leadership and responsive/proactive followership, more studies are being conducted on the informal processes of upward influence in organizations (e.g. Ferris et al. 1997; Kipnis et al. 1980; Schriesheim & Hinkin 1990; Yukl & Tracey 1992).

The literature on upward influence has predominantly focused on developing taxonomies and measures of influence tactics (Kipnis et al. 1980; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990), identifying when subjects make upward influence attempts (Gardner & Martinko, 1988), determining subjects' choice of influence strategies (Cable & Judge 2003; Liden & Mitchell, 1988), and assessing the effect of upward influence behaviours on target reactions (Cable & Judge 2003; Yukl & Tracey, 1992).

Although studies attest to some upward influence tactics having a positive effect on manager perceptions of subordinate interpersonal skills, it has been noted that negative impressions can be given when using tactics such as bargaining, assertiveness, and self-promotion (Ferris et al. 1997). What it comes down to is the type of influence tactic adopted (Wayne & Ferris 1990) and as Kaul (2003) found; "understanding superiors, their expectations, constraints and being familiar with the types of communication would aid in influencing". Pettitt and Dunlap (1995) also state that while upward influence is now an established phenomenon it is, nonetheless, unlikely that followers or leaders can successfully influence others unless "they are technically competent and versed in both interpersonal and task related skills such as active listening, communication, problem analysis and conflict management" (p.4).

The terms 'social skills', 'interpersonal skills' and 'communication skills' are often used interchangeably although interpersonal and social skills are generally referring to developmental applications while communication skills can encompass written as well as interpersonal skills.

That communication is of central importance in any interaction is fairly obvious, however, it was not until 1960 that the notion of communication as a form of skilled activity was first suggested (Hargie 1997). In the intervening years there have been numerous investigations into the nature and function of interpersonal interaction and several approaches to training in communication skills specifically have been introduced to ascertain whether it is possible to improve the social performance of an individual (See Dickson et al. 1997).

With the importance of skilled communication acknowledged, what exactly defines 'communication'? In their review of competence and organizations, Jablin and Putnam (2001) made the note that "there are almost as many definitions of communication competence as there are researchers interested in the construct" (p.820). This is interestingly akin to comments made about the countless definitions of leaders and leadership. A further parallel to leadership concerns can be found in Rubin's (in Phillips & Wood 1990) declaration that "virtually every definition of communicative competence includes the mandate that communication be both appropriate and effective" (p.108), and these varying standards that escape and hope of consensus appear to debilitate the majority of theories concerned with social interaction.

Communication and social interaction in general have retained a prescriptive orientation and the area of superior-subordinate communication has been concerned with identifying 'best' styles, tactics, and behaviours (See Jablin 1979; Pettit et al. 1997) with the advice still aimed at managers who, if they are able to identify "best practice", "will improve the manager's effectiveness in the relationship (Yrle et al. 2003).

One crucial ingredient that often gets a mention is that of sensitivity. A person is considered sensitive if he or she can perceive or otherwise respond appropriately to the internal states (e.g., cognitive, affective, motivational) of another, understand the antecedents of those states, and predict the subsequent affective, cognitive, and behavioural events that will result. The presumption is that similar to other intellectual, physical, and emotional competencies, this ability should enable an individual to function more

effectively in day-to-day life by facilitating interaction with others. Interpersonal sensitivity, then, can be defined most generally as the ability to sense, perceive accurately, and respond appropriately to one's personal, interpersonal, and social environment (Bernieri & Hall 2001, p.3).

One approach focusing on increasing interpersonal sensitivity and understanding has been the study of individual personality dispositions and preferences, observing the potential impact on workplace behaviour and effectiveness.

Some of the older, well-established self-report personality instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Hirsh 1985; Hirsh & Kummerow 1990), the Kirton Adaptation Inventory (Kirton 2003), and the Adjective Check List (Gough & Heilbrun 1983) have been and continue to be extremely popular with organisational practitioners and applied researchers in industry settings (i.e. Church & Waclawski 1996; Furnham & Stringfield 1993; Gardner & Martinko 1996). The widespread acceptance and use of these tools has been attributed to their intuitive nature, ease of use, and relatively non-evaluative approach (Berr et al. 2001).

While undoubtedly popular, personality research has also faced extensive criticism and one of the biggest problems is the lack of structure in describing personality with a wide range of traits being investigated under different labels using different measures (Judge et al. 2002). As Huges et al. (in Hickman 1998) noted, "the labelling dilemma made it almost impossible to find consistent relationships between personality and leadership even when they really existed" (p.179).

Research examining the impact of cognitive style frequently uses the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Swanson & O'Saben 1993), considered to be the best known, most widely used and studied, psychological test today with over three million people a year completing the assessment instrument (Edwards et al. 2002; Gardner & Martinko 1996).

Based on Jungian psychology, MBTI assesses an individual's preferred behaviour in each of four categories. The choice between Extraversion and

Introversion considers how someone is energized, the choice between Sensing and iNtuition considers how someone gathers and understand information (perception), the choice between Thinking and Feeling considers how someone makes decisions (judgment), and the choice between Judging and Perceiving considers how someone organizes their life (orientation to the outer world) (Myers et al. 1998). The combination of the four preferences provides an individual with their personality type.

A thriving international industry has developed using this test in a variety of organizational and individual settings, including team building (Castka et al. 2001; Offerman & Spiros 2001); management development (Conway 2000; Gardner and Martinko 1996); decision making (Volkema & Gorman 1998); leadership (Gordon & Smith 2005; Steiner & Gaskin 1998); academic advising (Goby & Lewis 2000; Morgan 1997); self-management (Steiner & Gaskin 1998) and counseling (McCaulley 2000).

Despite its popular industry appeal, personality psychologists have generally been less enthusiastic about the MBTI with criticisms being raised on a number of grounds (Edwards et al. 2002; McCrae & Costa 1989). Disparity has been found between the conceptual foundation upon which the MBTI was based and its practical application, as Myers and Briggs developed the MBTI in many ways that were inconsistent with Jung's theory of personality types (Michael 2003). Psychometricians are troubled by the conception of psychological types and there has been considerable debate over the extent to which individual dispositions, versus situations, affect behaviour in organizations (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer 1989; House et al. 1996). According to the "situational argument the MBTI, and other personality inventories, is limited in its leadership explanatory power because organizational settings are considered "strong situations" (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer 1989). Type theory has also stated that the MBTI type one may display in a work environment may very well be entirely different to that showed at home or in a social situation (Kroeger & Thuesen 2002). However, there seems to be no reason why understanding an observed "work type" would have any less benefit if the

'actual' type of the person in question is more in line with that displayed at home in the absence of organizational restraints.

Until relatively recently, the use of MBTI was restricted to those who were certified by the Center for Psychological Type. This changed in 1985 with the first publication of *Please Understand Me* (Keirsey & Bates 1984), which includes a version of the Myers-Briggs test allowing anybody to determine their MBTI personality type. *Please Understand Me* quickly became a best seller and with its sequel, *Please Understand Me II* (Keirsey 1998), it remains popular to this day.

It has been found useful in making application of psychological type to communication. Keirsey and Bates (1984) note, for example, that differences in the Sensing – iNtuition preferences are the most common causes of misunderstanding and miscommunication. For example, the difference between the literalism of Sensors and the imagery of Intuitives is suggested to be a common start to communication difficulties where “one person sees a forest, the other sees trees” (Kroeger & Thuesen 1988, p.27).

Further attention was brought to Myers-Briggs by the publication of *Type Talk* in 1988 by Otto Kroeger and Janet Thueson, who coined the phrase “typewatching”, which they defined as “an organised, scientifically validated system” used by individuals and organisations that want to communicate better (Kroeger & Thueson 1988, p.8). It can be used in any workplace of any size and can be applied to a wide range of organisational activities, from hiring and firing to marketing and sales (Kroeger et al. 2002).

Some critics of MBTI are more supportive of The Big Five Theory, which is another popular personality instrument.

The five-factor model – comprising of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Adjustment and Culture was replicated by Norman in 1963 and heralded by him as the basis for ‘an adequate taxonomy of personality’. Taking a broader perspective, Buss (1991) wrote that the five personality factors “represent important features of the human “adaptive landscape”. Those who had the capacity to perceive and act upon these

major individual differences in others had a selective advantage when it came to negotiating hierarchies, selecting and attracting mates, and forming effective coalitions with other humans” (p. 485). The five factors are presumed to represent the topmost level of a personality hierarchy in which narrower traits and even narrower behaviours represent the lower levels (McCrae & John 1992; Paunonen & Ashton 2001).

This first factor, Extraversion, is said to represent the tendency to be outgoing, assertive, active, and excitement seeking. Individuals scoring high on Extraversion are strongly predisposed to the experience of positive emotions (Watson & Clark, in Hogan et al. 1997). Factor 2, Agreeableness, consists of tendencies to be kind, gentle, trusting and trustworthy, and warm. Factor 3, Conscientiousness, is indicated by two major facets: achievement and dependability. Conscientiousness is the trait from the five-factor model that best correlates with job performance (Barrick & Mount 1991). Factor 4, Emotional Adjustment, is often labelled by its opposite, Neuroticism, which is the tendency to be anxious, fearful, depressed, and moody. Emotional Adjustment is the principle Big Five trait that leads to life satisfaction and freedom from depression and other mental ailments (McCrae & Costa 1991). Finally, Factor 5, Openness to Experience (Sometimes labelled Intellectance), represents the tendency to be creative, imaginative, perceptive, and thoughtful.

Since its publication in 1962, many studies have been published on the reliability and validity of the MBTI and its application to a variety of settings (Woolhouse & Bayne 2000). Interestingly there have been studies that show correlation in the expected directions between MBTI continuous scores and other instruments tapping similar constructs. In particular, the MBTI has shown strong relationships with four of the Five scales in the Five-factor model of personality, as measured by the NEO-PI, with evidence that the observed behaviour of MBTI types is consistent with behaviour predicted by the Big Five Theory (McCrae & Costa 1989; Schneider & Smith; Thorne & Gough 1991).

Although a number of significant concerns have been raised about the validity of personality instruments, decades of workplace practice have shown that it is possible and useful to teach individuals the nature and value of individual differences. Understanding of interpersonal interaction can be increased by providing information on personality and explaining differences in work styles.

## **FOLLOWER CONDITION #2**

### **Willingness / Problem-responsibility**

When mentioning the topic of this thesis to various colleagues and superiors within a highly corporate organization, the response was constantly one of incomprehension as to why an Art of Followership was necessary when it is clearly the role of a leader to develop his or her followers. However, it took but one example of their own experience, with either current or past superiors, to illustrate how crucial it is for a follower to have the ability - the social skills - to adapt to their leader's expectations. People who have been in the workplace for years and are now supervisors themselves, displayed shock at this realisation, when it dawned on them the numerous strategies they themselves had employed, almost unconsciously, when dealing with different types of leaders.

The ingrained belief that ensuring a quality, high LMX, relationship between a leader and follower is the sole responsibility of the leader is a detrimental belief that followers need to be re-educated about. Leaders are followers too but trained only in how to deal with those below them and never advised in how to deal with pressures from above. As an over worked employee do you want to have a good relationship with your superior or your subordinate? Who is going to have the most affect on your career? If you have a bad relationship with a subordinate most likely there is going to be a restructure that conveniently removes the troublesome subordinate. But what happens when *you* are the 'troublesome' employee in the eyes of your superior? Your leader is under pressure and hasn't the time to follow his leadership training and develop you. Are you going to sit back and wait for him to do his

'leadership duty' and improve the relationship, hoping this will happen before the next restructure? If a follower wants to keep their job, to develop in their chosen career and to learn all they can from their current superior then they need to take the responsibility of mastering the Art of Followership.

Warrick (1981) found that followers spend "considerable time trying to figure out how to best work with a leader, predict how a leader will behave in different situations, and understand what a leader really means, wants, or expects" although Warrick's focus is on instructing leaders to maintain style consistency in order to make it easier and less stressful for followers to develop this understanding. Warrick even recognizes that leadership styles are not always well received but that, none-the-less, if the leader remains consistent it allows followers affected by the style to learn to work around it.

The most succinct argument found in the literature so far, and which also holds the basis of this thesis, was put forth by Crockett (1981) over two decades ago whereby he states in his article the following:

*"Subordinates can and should be more than passive robots to be manipulated and used by bosses. They have the responsibility -as well as the opportunity - for making the situation a good one, win/win for themselves as well as for the boss.*

*Another very pragmatic reason for our wishing to achieve excellence in followership is that we often get rewarded or punished as a result of our "followership" effectiveness. Our success in effectively filling our subordinancy roles is the key to our here-and-now security as well as to our future promotion and success. People get fired because they are ineffective subordinates. From this standpoint alone, the vitality and worth of the relationships is more important to the subordinate than it is to the boss - because it is the subordinate who has the most at stake!" (Crockett 1981, p.155)*

This last statement is the very thought that spurred the need for this thesis and brought on the dumbfounded shock when a literature review revealed absolutely no progress in the field. That it would require a thorough re-education, at all levels of the corporate world, to convince followers that it really is in their own best interest to accept responsibility for improving the quality of their relationship with their leaders.

Whether or not followers are aware of the truth of Crockett's proclamation the reality is that leaders are also followers and more often than not their focus is likely to be directed upwards rather than downwards as far as relationship development is concerned. It is crucial for followers to be aware of this, at a conscious level, to allow for metacognitive analysis of their situation and appreciate the dualistic nature of the leadership role.

### **FOLLOWER CONDITION #3**

#### **Utilisation**

Once a follower has developed an understanding of their leader, is motivated and willing to work on a high quality LMX relationship having accepted their responsibility in this, all that is left is to master the ability of utilising this knowledge to form a strategy for effective followership. This strategy is about self management, it is NOT about manipulating your leader. Once confident of what the leader requires and expects of you, all that is needed to secure a quality relationship is to manage your own behaviour and work practices in accordance.

Dickson and Hargie (2003) advise that competence in any skill requires understanding, both conceptual and behavioural, practice and feedback, and the opportunity to use the skill often enough for it to become integrated within the person's behavioural repertoire. Cameron (2000) adds that a 'skilled' person must also understand the 'why' behind the 'what' and the 'how' and be acquainted with the general principles of the activity so that behaviour can be modified in response to the exigencies of any specific situation.

Thus, not only must individuals learn the basic elements of followership but they need to develop the appropriate thought processes necessary to control the utilisation of these elements in interpersonal encounters.

Leadership Type and Style theories, personality measures, communication preferences, the mentioned literature is but a token sample of the plethora of information available that can be used to provide followers in organizations with valuable information on how to develop the metacognition and interpersonal skills to understand and fulfil the requirements and expectations of their leaders.

Without attempting to legislate in advance a prescriptive set of follower behaviours to meet every situation, the Followership Model illustrates how all the literature on leadership, followership and related subjects can, and should, be used as a resource to be employed in determining the most appropriate followership strategy to use with a particular leader in a given situation.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

Consider the following scenario: A direct subordinate of Al Dunlop reads Cheleff's book, decides the vicious downsizing, amongst other profit increasing tactics planned by 'Chainsaw' Al Dunlap, went against her own personal principles and so she 'courageously' challenges her leader. One very likely result would be that Dunlop fires her. Would such a consequence make this courageous follower successful? Supposing Dunlop's plans were successfully thwarted. People keep their jobs but the company's profits continue to decline. Is the follower now deemed effective? And in this scenario, how effective is Dunlop's leadership?

If these questions are difficult to answer, perhaps then Kelleher's leadership style would provide a better option having achieved slow but steady economic growth as well as content personnel. But even this approach has not always proved successful. Donald Burr was another airline CEO that had a similar

people-focused style of leadership. While initially showing impressive economic growth and personnel satisfaction, this CEO nonetheless had to watch his company go under even while his employees, his followers, continued to see him as a hero until the very end, albeit a fallen hero at the last.

Some may protest that followership, as described in this thesis, promotes subserviency where it is our duty to cater to our leaders' every need and whim in order to retain employment. This is wrong. The Art of Followership does not prescribe unquestioned obedience, not unless that is what a particular leader expects. In such a case, obedience is the very condition that indicates successful followership in the eyes of the leader. If this is contrary to the principles of the employee whose leader requires such followership, then the employee may wish to fight their leader and resign or even get fired in which case their followership is a clear failure even while their courage and moral fibre may be praised in their success at rebellion. The moment a follower ceases to follow they also cease to be, in fact, followers!

To reiterate, followership does not equal subservience. Many leaders expect their subordinates to show initiative and to challenge the status quo. In such a case unquestioned obedience would not meet that leaders expectations and would result in a judgement of ineffective followership.

The Art of Followership dictates the need to understand your leader, to develop strategies on how to meet their expectations, and if the leader's direction is not where you are comfortable going then a course of action that remains open is that of leaving.

The aim of this thesis has been to make a conceptual contribution to the field of followership. While the concept of followership is only beginning to take hold, it is fortunate in that there are multiple fields of relevant theory already available, rich in their implications for this new approach to leader-follower relationships.

The range of studies examined and reported on here has been necessarily selective due to limited time and a seemingly limitless amount of relevant

literature, and as such, this search has not accessed and reviewed all potentially relevant studies.

What has been attempted is for this thesis to challenge the assumptions surrounding leader-follower relationships where all action is attributed to the role of the leader. The thesis is to provide an introduction and awareness of the range of materials that are available in providing potential insight into the nature of followership and is to offer a Followership Model that opens future avenues for research.

Notwithstanding its inevitable selectivity in the literature reviewed, it is hoped that this thesis provides a sound and useful basis for this increasingly important field.

## **7.1 Future Research**

The concept of followership, as a skill base of its own, is still in its infancy and while it is attracting a growing amount of attention, it is important that a sound research program be established to identify, document and analyze how followership impacts the relationship between follower and leader.

Issues related to the social exchange in leader-follower relationships must be empirically tested examining factors such as the balance of effort that leaders and followers apply to their relationship and how important the quality of relationship is to each.

Research should be done to determine the variety of behavioral and work style requirements that leaders want from their followers and how aware they are of their own expectations. Results may be used to develop some prescriptive guidelines to assist followers in recognizing and understanding the expectations of their boss.

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