

The Role of Laizes-Faire Leadership Style on Followership in the Education Sector of Pakistan

Syed Akbar Shah^a, Yaser Iftikhar^b, Naif Dalish N Alanazi^c, Atif Aziz^d,
^{a,d}Karachi Institute of Economics & Technology, Pakistan, ^bDepartment of Business Administration University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, ^cSpecial Education for Diverse Needs, Giftedness and creativity Universiti Sains Malaysia,

Leadership is one of the most discussed topics by researchers in literature, however, unfortunately, the follower and followership aspect of leadership is ignored. This study aims to determine the relationship and impact of laissez-faire leadership on followership. Based on the literature, it was hypothesised that laissez-faire leadership has no significant impact on the academic staff of educational institutes. The data received from 124 respondents of private higher education institutes was gathered through a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two different constructs adapted from past studies on the Likert's scale, and the results were analysed. The analysis revealed that there is almost no relationship between laissez-faire leadership, and the followership. A regression analysis also found that there is no statistically significant impact of laissez-faire leadership upon academic staff. In this study, the single leadership style was tested and recommended to test other leadership styles with followership. This finding is consistent with past theories that state laissez-faire leadership has the least impact with followers and followership, and for academic staff, it is the most recommended leadership style as, academicians require freedom in their job.

Keywords: *Leadership, Followership, Exemplary followership, Laissez-faire leadership (LFL), Private higher education institutes (PHEIs).*

Introduction and Background

The interdependence of leadership and followership is known, yet leadership has been a burning issue among researchers (Yukl, 2012), and leadership literature has provided a variety of leadership theories, models, research processes, and books. Still, there is no cohort that any particular leadership theory is effective for all organisations (Jago, 1982). The definition of leadership is incomplete without the follower, but the aspect of followership is totally ignored by researchers in leadership research (Baker, 2007; Bligh, 2011; Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010; Sy, 2010). The lack of research on followership, as compared to leadership, is attributed to various factors. One factor informs that followership is generally associated with negative words, such as passive, low status, unimaginative, and inability to make independent decisions (Alcorn, 1992). Another factor states that in the traditional hierarchical organisational structure, and leader-follower exchange relationship, the leader is the one who leads and directs but the followers follow the leader on an expected level of performance (Avolio & House & Shamir, 1993). The dilemma with followership continues when the follower is considered to be the recipient of the leader's influence, and the constructor of leaders (Meindl, 1995).

A reason for the negligence of assessing the followership in leadership research is largely due to the relation of followership constructs with leadership because leadership is not understood as a social interaction process among people (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). In this regard, leadership can only occur when there is followership. Therefore, followership is a key factor to be studied in the leadership process because when leadership is influencing others, then followership is allowing oneself to be influenced (Shamir, Pillai, Bligh, & Uhl-Bien, 2007). Similarly, when leadership is granting a leader identity to another, then followership is claiming an identity for oneself (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Pakistan, being a developing country, has not focussed on its higher education since its inception. For a population of 20 million people, in 2000, there were 32 universities, and 13 degree awarding institutes, of which 14 universities, and eight degree awarding institutes belonged to the private sector, and the remaining were public sector universities. The trend of acquiring higher education in Pakistan increased, which resulted in the demand of a higher educational institute. To solve this issue, the Government of Pakistan began the allocation of additional funds to higher education, and the Universities Grants Commission (UGC) was converted to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002. The HEC focussed on the improvement of current institutes, and the establishment of new institutes were encouraged. Therefore, a number of higher institutes have been established since then, and the number of universities, and degree awarding institutes in Pakistan has now reached to 111, and 76, respectively (Ahmed & Ali, 2016); ("hecpakistan - Google Search," n.d.).

Literature on leadership-followership indicates that leadership and followership have many common characteristics, and enhancing followership skills is necessary for effective leadership (Brown & Thornborrow, 1996). Furthermore, researchers argue that there should be a balance approach to study the contribution of followers towards leadership, and organisational effectiveness (Dvir & Shamir, 2003); (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001)(Hollander, 1992)(Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999)(Yukl, 1999). Many studies show that different leadership styles have different kinds of relationship and impact upon followership. Laissez-faire Leadership, being a passive mode of leadership, is not involved with the organisation, and the followers. It is therefore necessary to study the relationship, and impact of Laissez-faire leadership upon followership.

Literature Review

Followership

The concept of followership can be traced back to the nineteen-thirties, and the interdependency of leaders and followers. The concept reflects the importance of the active followership. The negligence of the consideration of followers and followership in research and academia was discussed by Follet in 1933. Academic interest in followership developed after the publication of the power of followership (Baker, 2007). Followership is indirectly discussed in leadership and various terminology is used, which includes: followers, collaborators, participants, direct reports, and constituents but the most frequently used terminology is 'subordinate' (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). In past research studies, the concept of followership is described as a function of the follower, leader, and situational variables (Hersey, Blanchard, & Dewey, n.d.), but there is no universally agreed definitions and descriptions of leader, and leadership, as well as of followers, and followership. Conceptualised, leadership and followership is described as: "People who are effective in leadership role have the vision to set corporate goals and strategies, the interpersonal skills to achieve consensus, the verbal capacity to communicate enthusiasm to large and diverse groups of individuals, the organizational talent to coordinate disparate efforts and above all, the desire to lead. People who are effective in the follower role have the vision to see both the forest and the trees, the social capacity to walk well with each other's, strength of character to flourish without heroic status, the moral and psychological balance to pursue personal and corporate goals at no cost to others, and, above all, the desire to participate in a team effort for the accomplishment of some greater common purpose."

Compared to leadership, followership has been a neglected area (Burns, 1978);(Meindl, 1995), and it is one of the serious failures of leadership research to exclude followership in leadership research. Leadership research characterises leaders as heroic figures who hold

power over the followers, and it can be labelled as elitist in nature (Burns, 1978). Leadership without followers is meaningless, and leadership does not exist without followership.

Theories of Followership

As followership is a vital part of leadership; and without follower and followership, leadership is meaningless, all leadership theories have explained the followership explicitly or implicitly.

In leadership research, situational leadership theory highlighted the commitment from followers to complete a task, reflecting the ability of a leader based upon their relationship. Meanwhile, contingency leadership theory explained the importance of the followership as the interaction between leaders, and the followers within an organisational system. The success of a leader is determined by the ability to motivate followers to complete a task, and the satisfaction of the followers was explained in the process in a path-goal model (Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971). In transactional leadership theory, it focusses upon the transactions in which leaders engage with followers to pursue goals by providing rewards. Transformational leadership theory emphasises the development of followers' leadership capacity (Ilies, Judge, & Wagner, 2006). The leader-member exchange theory explains the dynamic relationship based on four different stages as the leader, and the follower progresses with their relationship as partners, rather than in a mere interdependent relationship between the leader, and the follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, the servant leadership theory emphasised upon the empowerment of the follower, trust between the leader and followers, and declared that great leaders are seen as a servant first.

Kelley's Followership Theory

Followership received the attention of researchers on this topic because according to, "Leadership is the reward for good followership". According to his theory, a leader attracts and retains followers for the success of the leadership, and for the organisation. Furthermore, the relationship between the leadership and the followership is dialectic, interchangeable, interdependent, and synergetic. Kelley designed a matrix on two dimensions, based upon which various followership typologies were defined. These two dimensions are active engagement, and critical thinking, and the typologies are exemplary followership, alienated followership, conformist, pragmatists, and passive followers. Exemplary followers are high scorers of both dimensions in active engagement, and independent thinking. These kinds of followers are high in independent thinking and are low in active engagement scores. Conformists are low in independent thinking, and high on the active engagement dimension score. Pragmatist followers form the middle in active engagement, and critical thinking

dimensions scores. Passive followers are low in independent thinking, and active engagement scores.

Chaleff's Theory of Followership

Chaleff (2009) has emphasised on followership and has stressed upon the mutual dependency between leaders, and followers. According to him, the mark of great followers is the growth of leaders, and the leader and follower circle forms a common goal, rather than the followers orbit around the leader. He used the two dimensions of support, and challenge, and has identified four types of followers. These two critical dimensions are the degree of support from the follower to his leaders, and the degree to which the follower is willing to challenge the leader's behaviour or policies. Chaleff's courageous followership types are: partners, implementers, individualists, and resource people. Partners are high on both support, and challenge dimensions, and are purpose driven, mission oriented, and hold people accountable. Implementers are high on the support dimension, and low on the challenge dimension, and are dependable, supportive, and compliant. Individualists are low on the support dimension but high on the challenge dimension, and are confrontational, independent thinkers, and sometimes rebellious. Resource people are low on both the support, and challenge dimensions, and are always available, uncommitted, and execute minimum requirements.

Chaleff's courageous follower is cooperative, collaborative, and has all the qualities of integrating their ego to communal responsibilities; guiding leaders about pitfalls; and lessens the gap between the leaders, and the followers by bridging them. Furthermore, they are participants, committed to shared values and purposes, are willing to accomplish the company's vision, and are inspired to give their full dedication. Different types of courage have been identified by Chaleff in his courageous followers, which include courage to assume responsibility, serve, challenge, participate, and take moral actions.

Kellerman Theory of Followership

Kellerman conducted a study on followership in the context of the globalisation effect and the associated factors of the Internet, flatter organisation, cultural changes, technological changes, economic situations, position of the work, position of the follower, and concept of the leader. In the study, five different typologies of followership were found on the level of engagement, which are: isolate, bystanders, participant, activist, and diehard. Isolates are characterised as they are completely detached from leaders, and the work. They know little and do little, and are not interested, informed or motivated. Moreover, they feel that they are powerless and are not concerned about the work and the organisation but mainly about the leader. Bystanders are characterised as making intentional decisions to observe and to withdraw from their leaders, and group dynamics, and to not participate. They provide tacit

support to maintain the status quo only. Participants are characterised as engaging at a certain level by supporting the leader or going against the leaders, and they participate in a limited way. Activists are strongly engaged, energetic, and are eager towards the leaders. They also work hard to support or sabotage them. Diehards are high and deeply committed; have the will to risk all, and to the point of death for their leaders; and are deeply devoted or may eliminate the leaders.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

One of the leadership dimensions acknowledged by experts is Laissez-Faire Leadership, in which the leader delegates all decision-making authority to his subordinates. This leadership style is reflective of a disregard for supervisory duties, providing a lack of guidance to subordinates, and showing a careless attitude to the job or the performance (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). Under such type of leadership, employees have the complete freedom to make decisions by providing them with all the necessary tools and resources, due to which followers are expected to perform highly, and solve their own problems. Subsequently, it becomes a good learning opportunity for developing and knowing about organisational tools (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003).

Though, in this type of leadership there is less supervisory guidance to the subordinates, it is much more useful when the employees are skilled and motivated to perform their responsibilities and tasks on their own (Chaudhry & Javed, 2012). This leadership style is useful in situations where subordinates must perform routine tasks with fewer complexities, must make decisions frequently, and the process of decision-making is easy. However, people vary according to nature, and this style of leadership becomes drastic when employees are not highly skilled, are un-willing to perform duties on their own, lack expertise of the tasks to perform, and cannot handle projects or take decisions independently (Eagly et al., 2003). The main advantage of this leadership style is allowing team members substantial autonomy in their work, which leads to job satisfaction, and increased productivity. On the contrary, it can be damaging if subordinates lack skills and abilities to perform work effectively. One of the reasons for the failure of this leadership style is a lack of sufficient control by the leader upon their subordinates (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015).

Laissez-faire Leadership and Followership

Laissez-faire leaders avoid decision-making and supervisory responsibility and are inactive rather than active or proactive. In other words, this is a passive type of leadership or absence of leadership (Den Hartog, Van Muijen, & Koopman, 1997); (Goodnight, 2004). Furthermore, a laissez-faire leader reinforces the status quo, discouraging personal and organisational development (Hirtz, Murray, & Riordan, 2007). The leadership provides no

linkage of laissez-faire leadership with followership, based upon the above review of conceptual explanations of the laissez-faire leadership style.

The literature reflects that a laissez-faire leadership style does not have any relationship with the followers because this leadership style discourages personal and organisational involvement. Which results that with whom, follower should interact if the leaders are not involved with the follower and the organisation. Therefore, it is implied that the laissez-faire leadership style has no relationship, and impact upon followership. On the basis of the literature, it can be hypothesised that:

***Hypothesis:** Laissez-faire leadership has a positive relationship and impact upon exemplary followership.*

Conceptual Model

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Methodology

This chapter is based upon the research method, and the operationalisation of the study through the research questions answered. Population; sampling; sample size; research strategy; research approach; statistical test; and instruments to measure the variables, and the relationships among them.

Population

The target population of the study is faculty members of the private higher education institutes (HEIs) of Karachi, Pakistan, where students of undergraduate programmes are enrolled in business studies or management studies. According to an expert survey, there is an average of 25 faculty members in the department of business education in each institute. According to the HEC, there are 20 private higher education institutes in Karachi, which provides a total population size of 500 for this study.

Sampling

The sampling technique used in this study is convenience sampling, and a sample size of 109 was estimated based on a 95 per cent confidence level, five per cent margin of error, and an estimated 90 per cent response rate, using Raosoft. The questionnaire was mailed to 350

faculty members, and 132 questionnaires were returned with a 38 per cent response rate. Finally, 124 questionnaires, which were completely filled, were processed in this study.

Measurement

The variables were tested on a Likert scale, which was adapted from existing published papers to be consistent with past studies. The following Figure 2 shows the items and sources of the questionnaire.

Figure 2. Sources of the Constructs

| Construct | Source | Operationalisation |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Exemplary Followership | Adapted PhD thesis of and originally developed by Kelley. | Consists of twenty items on a seven-point Likert scale. |
| Laissez-Faire Leadership Style | Adapted from Barling & Frone, 2016. | Scale consists of five items and measures the laissez-faire leadership style on a five-point Likert scale. |

Pilot Testing

To check the goodness of fit of the model, reliability, and validity tests were conducted for the constructs used in this study.

Reliability Test

| Construct | Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------------|-------|------------------|
| Laissez Faire Leadership | 5 | 0.62 |
| Followership | 20 | 0.78 |

Cronbach's alpha revealed that all the constructs showed a higher consistency, except participative leadership ($\alpha = 0.62$), and these alpha values are consistent with past studies. The value of Cronbach's alpha was not given in the source paper, but it was also found to have a higher consistency ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Validity Test

The validity explains the meaningfulness of the construct to measure a certain variable. It suggests at what extent decisions are meaningful, on the basis of the data extracted from the sample (Golafshani, 2003; Drost, 2011). There are many types of validity according to different researchers, such as content validity, face validity, and construct validity. The face validity of the instrument is the researcher's own assessment about the clear presentation of

the items (Oluwatayo, 2012). This can be measured by analysing the mean scores of the responses. This construct is overall valid because the mean scores are fair for the individual construct. Regarding the content validity, all the items have been taken from past studies. The items of the constructs have also been examined by field experts and have ensured the validity.

Construct validity is measured by convergent validity through the inter-correlation between the items of the constructs (Jakobsson, 2011). The correlation of each variable was measured and found that items for all the constructs were correlated with each other.

Findings & Analysis

Demographics

In this study, only private higher educational institutes located in Karachi were included. The demographic detail of the study is discussed below.

Table 1: Organisations wise distribution of Sample

| Organisation | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| Bahria University | 4 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| Dadabhoy | 6 | 4.8 | 8.1 |
| FAST-NU | 10 | 8.1 | 16.1 |
| Hamdard University | 12 | 9.7 | 25.8 |
| Ilma University | 9 | 7.3 | 33.1 |
| IoBM | 8 | 6.5 | 39.5 |
| Iqra University | 16 | 12.9 | 52.4 |
| KASBIT | 8 | 6.5 | 58.9 |
| KIET | 14 | 11.3 | 70.2 |
| MAJU | 17 | 13.7 | 83.9 |
| Preston | 9 | 7.3 | 91.1 |
| SZABIST | 11 | 8.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 124 | 100.0 | |

The distribution of the data reveals that 12 institutes responded to the questionnaire, among which the maximum respondents were from the MAJU (13.7 per cent), and the lowest number were from Bahria University (3.2 per cent).

Gender Wise Distribution of Sample

Table 2: Distribution of sample according to Gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Male | 87 | 70.2 |
| Female | 37 | 29.8 |
| Total | 124 | 100 |

The respondents in this study were comprised of males at a rate of 70.2 per cent, and females, at a rate of 29.8 per cent.

Designation Wise Distribution of the Sample

Table 3: Distribution of sample according to Designation

| Designation | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Professors | 82 | 66.1 |
| Associate Professors | 22 | 17.7 |
| Assistant Professors | 9 | 7.3 |
| Lecturers | 11 | 8.9 |
| Total | 124 | 100 |

According to designation, the respondents were divided into six categories. A majority of the respondents were lecturers (66.1 per cent), and Associate Professors formed a minority at 7.3 per cent.

Experience Wise Distribution of the Sample

Table 4: Distribution of sample according to Experience

| Years | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1–5 | 44 | 34.6 |
| 6–10 | 43 | 33.9 |
| 11–15 | 20 | 15.7 |
| 16–20 | 8 | 6.3 |
| 20–25 | 9 | 7.1 |

The distribution of the respondents on the basis of experience revealed that a majority of 34.6 per cent were had one to five years' experience, and a minority of 6.3 per cent had 16–20 years' of experience.

Education Level Wise Distribution of the Sample

Table 5: Distribution of sample according to Education Level

| Education Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| MPhil & PhD | 119 | 96 |
| Masters | 5 | 4 |
| Total | 124 | 100 |

A majority of the sample (96 per cent) possess a M.Phil or PhD, and only a few respondents hold MBAs (four per cent).

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the study were calculated to obtain an instant picture of the data by using SPSS 20. The descriptive characteristics are summarised below.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics: Minimum, Maximum, Standard Deviation, and Variance

| Construct | N | Min | Max | Mean | SD | Variance |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|----------|
| Laissez-Faire Leadership | 124 | 3 | 5 | 4.16 | 0.40 | 0.160 |
| Followership | 124 | 5 | 6 | 5.43 | 0.397 | 0.158 |

The descriptive statistics show the mean score for followership is 4.16 (SD = 0.40), and for Laissez-faire leadership it is 5.43 (SD = 0.397).

Normality Test

Before the regression analysis, possible errors with the data were checked. It is compulsory for the data to be normally distributed. To check whether data were distributed normally, skewness, and kurtosis were reviewed. Accordingly, the values are summarised below.

Table 7: Skewness and Kurtosis

| Construct | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Followership | 0.936 | 0.217 | -1.090 | 0.431 |
| Laissez-Faire Leadership | -0.451 | 0.217 | 0.0040 | 0.431 |

The Table 7 reveals that the data for the variables followership ($s = 0.936$, $k = -1.090$), and for laissez-faire leadership ($s = -0.451$, $k = 0.0040$), are normally distributed and there are no serious errors related to the data collected.

Correlation Analysis

Table 8: Bivariate Correlations

| Variables | Followership | Laissez-Faire Leadership |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Followership | 1 | |
| Laissez-Faire Leadership | 0.056 | 1 |

The Table 8 depicts that the dependent variable, i.e., exemplary followership, has a very weak and positive correlation with laissez-faire Leadership (0.056).

Regression Analysis

The equation of multiple regressions — based on the conceptual framework — was built and tested. To check the magnitude, and direction of the effect of laissez-faire leadership upon exemplary followership, a multiple regression analysis was performed. On the basis of the conceptual model, the following statistical model was developed:

$$\text{Exemplary Followership} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Laissez-Faire Leadership} + \varepsilon$$

Model Summary

Table 9: Model Summary of the regression analysis

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| R | 0.056 |
| R Square | 0.003 |
| Adjusted R Square | -0.005 |
| Std. Error | 0.398 |

The model summary of regression analysis predicts the values of the correlation coefficient (R), and coefficient of determination (R^2). The results reveal a 0.3 per cent variance ($R^2 = 0.003$) in followership can be predicted from the Laissez-faire leadership style.

ANOVA Analysis

The ANOVA results of regression show that the Laissez-faire leadership style does not significantly contribute ($p = 0.534$) to exemplary followership.

Table 10: ANOVA Analyses

| ANOVA ^a | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 0.062 | 1 | 0.062 | 0.390 | 0.534 ^b |
| | Residual | 19.349 | 122 | 0.159 | | |
| | Total | 19.410 | 123 | | | |

- a. Dependent Variable: Followership
b. Predictors: (Constant), LaissezFaire

Coefficient Analysis

To analyse the impact of exemplary followership upon the dependent variable, the slope coefficient, t-values, and significance are given below for analysis.

Table 11: Coefficient Table

| Model | Unstandardised Coefficients | | Standardised Coefficient | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------------------------|--------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | T | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 5.196 | 0.375 | | 13.851 | 0.000 |
| Laissez-Faire Leadership | 0.056 | 0.090 | 0.056 | 0.624 | 0.534 |

The values of the tables reveal that the Laissez-faire Leadership style does not have a significant impact upon followership ($B = 0.056$, $t(124) = 13.851$, $p > 0.05$).

Hypothesis Testing

Figure 3. Hypotheses Test

| Hypothesis | Hypotheses | P-Value & Slope | Result |
|------------|--|------------------------|---------------|
| 1a | <i>H₀: Laissez-faire leadership style has no significant relationship with exemplary followership.</i> <i>H₁: Laissez-faire leadership style has no significant relationship with exemplary followership.</i> | R = 0.056 | Null accepted |
| 1b | <i>H₀: Laissez-faire leadership style has no significant impact upon exemplary followership.</i> <i>H₁: Laissez-faire leadership style has a significant impact upon exemplary followership.</i> | P = 0.534 B = 0.056 | Null accepted |

Conclusion

Discussion & Findings

The hypotheses were made based on the literature review, and the theoretical groundings were checked by correlation, and regression analysis. The result of the first hypothesis (1a) indicated that the laissez-faire leadership style has no relationship with exemplary followership. This finding is consistent with the previous theory, that laissez-faire leadership does not involve followers, and followers are free to perform their duties, as a result of the absence of a leader and leadership (Den Hartog, Van Muijen, & Koopman, 1997; Goodnight, 2004). The result of the second hypothesis (1b) shows that there is no statistically significant impact of laissez-faire leadership upon exemplary followership. In the leadership literature, laissez-faire leadership was defined to include a lack of involvement of followers, and followers are allowed to perform their duties with minimum supervision. The results of this study validated the theory that laissez-faire leadership has no correlation with followership. Previously, no study was conducted to determine the relationship of these two variables. Therefore, this study will provide a base to conduct further research on this topic. In addition to the correlation analysis, a regression analysis revealed that laissez-faire leadership has no statically significant impact upon exemplary followership.

Limitations

In the leadership literature, this is the very first study which was conducted to determine the relationship, and the followership. Therefore, limited literature was available on the relationship, and impact of these two variables. This study was conducted on faculty members of private higher education institutes within Karachi, in Pakistan, and therefore, the availability of literature in a local context regarding predictor and criterion variables is one of the major limitations of this study. Consequently, the researcher was required to refer to the literature in an international context. Despite having limitations of literature, this study can provide a direction for future studies upon followership, and other leadership styles. The research model of this study was developed based on the literature available, which could be used in future for further studies in other geographic areas, and sectors. The developed model can be broadened by adding or replacing more variables on followership, which can be tested in the future.



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