

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF *FOLLOWERSHIP*

Early Trends

According to Offermann, followers have power. That power resides in the ability of followers to “either support or sabotage” the success of leaders. The follower “can influence the actions of leaders for better or for worse.”¹ Whereas recent trends have expanded follower roles, leaders formerly had exclusive rights to the domain of leadership.²

At one time in the early and mid 20th century the “Great Man” (or “Great Woman”) approach was popular in leader-follower studies. There was an attempt to distinguish between the leader and follower in such a way so as to make the two “different species.”³ Customizing leadership for the followers of different organizations was not understood.

¹Offermann, 828.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 829.

Mutual Influence

The mutual influence trend changed with studies on leaders and followers by Crowe, Bochner, and Clark. For instance, their studies revealed that followers could influence democratic leaders to start behaving autocratically.¹

In 1958 the psychologist Edwin Hollander put forward the idiosyncrasy credit model which basically stated that leaders must earn the right to influence followers. In other words, followers will choose leaders who have earned the most psychological credit. "As long as the exchange is balanced, credit will be given and satisfaction and productivity will result."² In the last years of the twentieth century Hollander has spoken to the critical role of the follower for the leader. ". . . leadership is a process that involves followership. Followers are crucial because they either give leaders their support or withhold it."³

The LMX Theory

In 1975 George Graen formulated the Vertical Dyad Linkage. This formula examined the relationship between a leader and followers as links between members of two different levels within an organization. Eventually, this approach developed into what

¹B. J. Crowe, S. Bochner, and A. W. Clark, "The Effects of Subordinate Behavior on Managerial Style," *Human Relations* 25, no. 3 (1972): 215-237, quoted in Offermann, 829.

²E. P. Hollander, "Conformity, Status, and Idiosyncrasy Credit," *Psychological Review* 65 (1958): 117-127, quoted in Offermann, 829.

³E. P. Hollander and J. W. Julian, "Contemporary Trends in the Analysis of Leadership Processes," *Psychological Bulletin* 71 (1969): 387-391, quoted in Goethals and Sorenson, 871.

is now called LMX or Leader-Member Exchange theory.¹ Research here has documented that leaders do establish different relationships with different followers and that “these different relationships affect a wide variety of outcomes for leaders, followers, and their organizations.”² Here are further factors that result from better-quality leader-follower relationships: mutual support and respect, loyalty, affection, and greater autonomy and freedom to make decisions. An interesting discovery is—“When LMX is favorable, leaders are more supportive of followers and may monitor them less and mentor them more.”³ Positive relationships between leaders and followers “yield better overall performance, satisfaction, and satisfaction with supervision on the part of followers, as well as less role conflict, more role clarity, and greater organizational commitment.”⁴ However, there are not always good vibrations with leader-follower relationships; sometimes there are conflicts over perceived in-groups while others remain on the outside.

It is significant that leaders with poor quality relationships with followers have lower expectations from them, even though the paycheck and benefits are equal. However, followers in excellent LMX relationships tend to “get more from leaders in terms of

¹G. B. Graen and M. Uhl-Bien, "Relationship-Based Approach to Leadership: Development of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory over 25 Years: Applying a Multi-Level Domain Theory," *Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1995): 219-247, quoted in Offermann, 829.

²Offermann, 830.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

influence, benefits, and job prospects, even when working under the leader's higher expectations in terms of commitment and effort."¹

Transforming Model

James MacGregor Burns suggested that in leader-follower relations there is another step beyond the transaction of self-interest. Transformational leadership appeals to followers on the basis of moral values and calls followers to rise above self-interest to the greater good.²

Bernard Bass's model of transformational leadership emphasizes "the importance of influencing and empowering followers to accomplish shared objectives."³ Factors such as trust and respect become evident. Leaders are followed because of admiration and trust of the leader.

Offermann adds more factors—"Leaders who are transformers articulate a compelling vision based upon shared values, inspire followers to act, and empower followers to move the vision into reality."⁴

¹Offermann, 830.

²"Mentoring," *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, ed. James MacGregor Burns, George R. Goethals, and Georgia J. Sorenson (2004), 2:831, quoted in Offerman, 831.

³B. Bass and R. Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), 540, quoted in Offermann, 831.

⁴Offermann, 831.

A major element in these theories of transformational leadership is the significance of the emotional as well as the rational processes. In some instances the followers have been willing to set aside their own best interests for the sake of the organization.

Another contributing factor is the empowerment of followers, where power becomes shared; thus, followers are permitted to develop their own leadership skills. Offermann upholds empowerment as changing the nature of the leader-follower equation, placing followers on a more equitable basis with leaders and fostering choice and self-discovery.¹

¹Offermann, 831.