


2014

The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership

Robert Alan Leonard
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Robert Leonard

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Walden University
2014

Abstract

The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership

by

Robert Alan Leonard

MBA, University of Baltimore, 1993

BA, Loyola College in Maryland, 1987

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2014

Abstract

With a culture focused on leadership, the purpose in this study was to explore untested assumptions about followers and their being ignored as independent productive actors in the workplace. The lived experience of followers and their impact on the success or failure of organizations during periods of absent leadership was explored via 4 independent situations. A qualitative, phenomenological research design based primarily on the theoretical framework of Moustakas and the research design of Patton guided the study. The 3 key research questions were explored with regard to followers during periods of absent leadership: how they respond, what actions they take to fill the void, and the purpose of their actions and reactions. The qualitative data were coded and centered around 4 themes: (a) productivity, (b) morale, (c) direction, and (d) interpersonal behavior during periods of absent leadership. The results indicated that followers did not descend into chaos without leaders, thus refuting a primary conjecture about their assumed workplace behavior. Instead, emergent consensual self-managing teams arose, and this research resulted in a proposed organization-member exchange (OMX) construct for further research to account for the environmental context as a potential substitute to the traditional leader-follower relationship. Social change may occur by increasing efficiencies if additional training is provided for followers to prepare themselves for absent leadership and for leaders to realize the full potential of followers. Attempts at developing self-managed groups to fully utilize the leadership potential might serve to negate negative effects of the departure of a designated leader and promote employee wellbeing as contributing and valued members of the organization.

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Dedication

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Use of that time typically comes at the expense of some other thing one wishes to be doing, or some other place one wishes to be. It also means, perhaps more importantly, that the time exhausted in the journey may very well mean time spent away from those who support you the most in accomplishing the task at hand.

It is with this in mind that I dedicate this work to my beautiful and amazingly supportive wife Teresa and my truly understanding and adorable daughter Emma (who oftentimes thought it somewhat cool for us both to be in school at the same time). Many nights, weekends, and family outings sacrificed for the sake of attaining this goal came at the great price of time with the two people who most devotedly encouraged me to push forward and complete the work at hand. And now, at its culmination, I thank them with all my heart and I only hope that I can, at least once over the course of the rest of my life, show each of them the same unconditional support and encouragement they have shown me in this endeavor.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge those who have inspired or otherwise supported me in this research effort. Credit for the inspiration to immerse myself in the subject matter itself goes to Anne Hacker, PhD. It was in her Organizational Theory and Behavior course at Walden University that my curiosity in the relationship between leaders and followers, as likened to the chicken and the egg conundrum, first came about and subsequently piqued my interest for related study. Her encouragement to research this area in more depth proved instrumental to the collective dissertation process.

Although I never studied directly under Walter McCollum, PhD, also of Walden University, his immediate embracing and support of the concept of studying the role of followership during periods of absent leadership served as a significant source of self-confidence in my ability to research and present a meaningful study. His commendation for my initiative to pursue this research and subsequently create a cohort amongst fellow dissertation students not only provided a springboard for commencing the work but also a means for peer support and encouragement regarding the challenges, milestone accomplishments, and successes shared in the journey. It is partly for this reason that I asked Dr. McCollum to serve as a member on my dissertation committee with guidance in the area of methodology.

John Nirenberg, PhD, is perhaps one of the most knowledgeable, supportive, and respected academics I have ever known. His constant guidance, encouragement, and grounding has enabled me to keep to the task at hand, focus on the principles of my research ambitions, and ultimately reach the final objective. I truly appreciate Dr.

Nirenberg's unwavering confidence in me and for serving as chair of my dissertation committee.

Outside of the immediate Walden University community, I need also to acknowledge Dr. Margaret Secoda, former Head of the Lower School at Gerstell Academy in Finksburg, Maryland. Recounting similar challenges from her personal doctoral journey—financial, family-related, and those associated with time management—Dr. Secoda was a constant source of sincere support, camaraderie, and encouragement and proved to be the ultimate beacon of light along the long, trying, and oftentimes dim path.

In the areas of both emotional and financial provision, I offer my sincere thanks to my sister and dear friend, Kathleen Hutzell, for her unfailing support of, and confidence in, my ability to complete this task—a repayment for which cannot be easily made.

And finally, while risking judgment as being cliché and perhaps even theatrical, I truly thank the Lord our God for putting these people in my life and for giving me the courage and presence of mind to pursue and accomplish my goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Much has been written about the leader-follower relationship, including work by thought leaders such as Kellerman (2008b), Chaleff (2001), Kelley (1992), Northouse (2010), Bennis (2010b), Ricketts (2002), Greenleaf (2002), and many others. The research that has been conducted has generally demonstrated that a positive exchange is both critical to organizational success and meaningful with regard to follower effectiveness and leadership development. Ricketts (2002), for example, noted that “it is important that the leader and followers work together to achieve organizational goals—or collaborate for success” (p. 4). Acceptance of this contention may be both reasonable and logical; however, the question of what consequences, actions, and reactions take place when that collaboration no longer exists was not addressed in the literature. In particular, what has not been evident in the research is the role of the follower during periods of absent leadership. If one were to liken the leader-follower relationship to the chicken-and-the-egg causality dilemma, whereby one asks which came first, the resulting arguments might very well hinge on asking if leaders are great because of exemplary followers, or if followers are successful and reliable because of effective leaders.

This argument may also lead to consideration of the possibility that leaders and followers share a partial influence on one another and that some aspects of the performance relationship are driven by the very nature and preparation of the respective individual leader or follower. The leadership literature, including that from Agho (2009), Covey (2008), and Merton (1969), has suggested that the act of leading and the utility of

the role of leader in organizational success is an ever-present need. Even Chaleff (2001), a proponent of the value of followership, noted that “traditional leadership theory puts the responsibility for the leader-follower relationship with the leader” (p. 2). Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen (2008) added that “despite the widespread consensus that one must have followers to warrant the label of leader, the spotlight has remained tightly centered on leaders” (p. 2). One can argue, then, that a sense of need for the formal leadership role exists, implying that a layer of supervision is essential to organizational success.

Turnover, extended illness, sudden departures, retirements, and other events such as the cyclical replacement of leaders in political and other environments, all instances and examples of absent leadership, have suggested that the organization will suffer and that followers drift aimlessly, leaving them unmotivated to carry on (Maner & Mead, 2010).

The follower may very well be capable of organizational contribution and effectiveness even in the face of absent leadership. Defining the role of *the follower* may not need to be confined to one individual, whereby groups of empowered followers could likely serve as ample substitutes for absent leadership. It might be possible for those followers to actually rise to the occasion during periods of absent leadership, rather than just waiting for direction and thus abandoning hope and responsibility for the company’s mission. Productivity might actually increase and organizational effectiveness may be more easily achieved. The requisite support and direction might emerge directly from the followers to bridge the gap between the absent leader and his or her replacement, or replacements. The absent leader situation may lead to an even more fundamental question, that of whether or not formal leadership is necessary at all. These

considerations invited investigation into how followers act when a leader is not present to lead and were the basis of the research and analysis to follow.

From a societal perspective, the concept of leadership has become universal. Even in the case of self-managing and autonomous teams, it has been considered natural to look to a leader; in fact, society as a whole has conditioned individuals to do so, as noted by Banai, Nirenberg, and Menachem (2000). The presumption of the importance of leadership served as a foundational consideration as a means to learn what specifically takes place on the part of the follower during periods of leader absence. This examination aligned with the primary purpose of this study, that being to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership.

Chaleff (1995, 2001), Kellerman (2004, 2008), and Kelley (1992, 1997, 1998), among others, have led the various arguments that an organization's opportunity for, and probability of, success has been significantly enhanced as a result of the quality of the leader-follower dynamic. It is difficult to argue the fundamental premise that the organization tends to suffer when the leader-follower relationship is weak. What has not been clear in current literature is the impact of absent leadership on the role of followership and how followers react when the recognized leader suddenly no longer exists. A commanding officer is killed in the field; an organization's leading executive retires or is dismissed; a baseball manager is ejected from the game. Examples such as these suggest that training, preparation, and transitional plans must be at the ready to overcome this leader absence.

At times of absent leadership, those who previously understood their role in the leader-follower relationship are released from that understanding and now must reestablish a productive role to continue organizational success. Perhaps informal leadership will emerge; perhaps the followers and the organization will remain in limbo. Maybe some will simply do nothing and move forward with a business-as-usual mentality. This research attempted to identify what happens in scenarios involving an absence of formal leadership.

Even when followers step up, as noted by Flinchbaugh (2011), risks must be considered, such as whether or not a follower who moves into the role of new leader will lead inadequately or ineffectively, in which case the surrogate leader, or one who has been deemed responsible for communication and sharing of the message in a means to help the organization understand the significance of the objectives intended, risks causing more harm than good when the communication's message deviates from the desired outcome. The lack of clear leadership may be troublesome for an organization; conversely, it might in fact provide an organizational opportunity as well. This risk/opportunity scenario truly becomes a two-edged sword for the organization. In times of reorganization and turnover in the leadership ranks, resulting in periods of absent leadership, followers are inevitably left with limited or no guidance and yet are still expected to remain constant in their contribution to the organization. When those periods of absent leadership are significantly extended, followers are expected to not only maintain their efforts but also to develop substitute methods of leadership until formal

leadership is reestablished. Semler (1989), among others, argued to this point, as will be discussed later in this paper.

The preponderance of the literature to date, such as that presented by Vera and Crossan (2004), Srinivasan (2007), and Hogan and Kaiser (2005), has been focused on leaders and the heroic actions of one person to lead. Current authors have not adequately questioned the need for the role and behavior of the formal leader such that the same for followers is proportionately considered. Kellerman (2008), through a course in followership at the Harvard Kennedy School, and Chaleff (1995), in Claremont McKenna College followership conferences, are among a distinct group of thought leaders who have researched, taught, and proposed theories on the topics of followership and related areas such as *servant leadership*, a term used to define those who give priority attention to others whom they serve and, in turn, put the fundamental needs of others in the forefront of an organization's priorities (Greenleaf, 2002).

The works of recognized researchers such as Kellerman (2008) and Chaleff (1995) have brought deserved attention to the premise that the role of followership as a function is not only critical to an organization, but is oftentimes preferred over the role of formal leadership in the collective organizational scenario. In consideration of these and other discourses on the topic of followership, such as those presented by Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, and Morris (2006), Nolan and Harty (2001), and Lundin and Lancaster (1990), two approaches to the analysis of the behavior of followers under conditions of absent leadership were studied in this context: (a) that absent or failed leadership may inspire and stimulate either the emergence of informal leadership or chaos among

followers; and (b) that followership may or may not simply be a passive and leadership-dependent component of the organization and, subsequently, may not necessarily require immediate efforts or some other serious interventions to fill the void in leadership. I examined these approaches via the fundamental purpose statement: to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership.

The overarching theme may very well be that the need and extent of any leadership role may be considerably varied depending upon situational circumstances. Hersey and Blanchard (1977) proposed situational leadership theory whereby no single leadership style could be considered *best*, but rather that the leader's ability to adapt his or her style to the task at hand would determine the effectiveness of the leadership action itself. Effective leadership, according to the Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership model presented in 1977, is a function of setting attainable goals coupled with the ability and willingness to assume responsibility for the resulting action. One might subsequently argue that everyone within the organization should be a leader, therefore absolving the need for any one individual to assume the role. Tichy (1997) argued that, while the best leaders are capable of grooming future leaders, leaders should also take strides to ensure that effective successors are developed within the organization. According to this argument, everyone is capable of leading; in fact, the capacity to lead is present in all who seek to lead, not just those in traditional formal leadership roles. The organizations able to cultivate sustained excellence are subsequently those able to develop future leaders who possess key assets: ideas, values, energy, edge, and stories.

Leadership is a position of influence that sometimes holds the capacity to compel individuals and groups toward collective goals and visions. Northouse (2010) noted that “without influence, leadership does not exist” (p. 3). With that influence comes an ability to transform processes that promote progress and that enable followers to effectively contribute and, at times, accomplish more than what is expected. Followership is a unique organizational role in which reaching those goals and contributing toward the attainment of specific missions brings leadership directives to fruition. Leadership also evolves out of experience. With that experience comes an eventual sense of power and influence. These characteristics in a leader can be either constructive or destructive to follower performance, and the leader who effectively influences others’ behaviors can be successful. Similarly, the leader who demonstrates significant decision-making shortcomings and effectiveness might work to withdraw influence and in turn delegate responsibility to the follower, perhaps even to the point of exchanging roles completely.

Power might be considered a prerequisite to effectively influence others, as influence itself might be considered a fundamental factor of that power. Power in the absence of influence may nonetheless be ineffective and may subsequently result in failed leadership whereby followers neither accept the authority of the leader nor the role of the leader itself (Maner & Mead, 2010). When, in turn, those same followers become the presumed new leaders, their recollection of accepted leadership may be affected either positively or negatively as a result. What might not be evident to the emergent leader is the potential not only to step in and merely assume a former leader’s power, but to be either covertly or overtly prevented from using that power. Peers, the now-absent leader’s

boss, clients, and partners hold the capability to interfere with the emergent leader's intentions, and can subsequently oppose and confront the follower-turned-leader. A detrimental result of power assumed by the follower on the rise might be that of leveraging the new power to act out of necessity by virtue of the leader absence. The use of power in this way can be not only misguided but mismanaged out of a lack of information and experience, and the new leader's ability to self-assess values, biases, strengths, and limitations as well as to discern those characteristics in the former leader becomes important.

An understanding of one's values, biases, strengths, and limitations not only on the part of the new emergent leader but on that of the existing followers is essential before meaningful and effective substitution for absent formal leadership can take place, as the "subordinate dimension has the most important effect on task performance" (Xu & Zhong, 2013, p. 682). Assessing and successfully managing these attributes can lead to self-awareness and a subsequent opportunity for self-management. This characteristic is critical for the follower who thrusts him- or herself, or is thrust, into a recognized role of replacing absent leadership to be effective and to bring meaningful action to the organization. The singular existence of action, however, does not necessarily indicate that positive leadership or followership will come to bear.

Covey (2008) suggested that "as a leader, you may control your actions, but not the consequences of your actions" (p. 20). For example, if the organization is not prepared for followers to step up and fill the leadership void or if it resists emergent leadership, the well-intentioned follower loses control over the situation. There may also

be a scenario in which no one wants to tackle the challenge presented by leader absence or there is no consensus effort to collectively work toward the achievement of common organizational goals during periods of absent leadership.

Both the followers and the organization as a whole might very well be confronted with the need to discover new substitutes for leadership. Kerr (1975), in recognition of the follower's ability to self-manage as a means to respond to and even diffuse leaderless scenarios and structures, developed the concept of substitutes for leadership. Arguing that followers might hold the capacity for self-management via setting personal objectives and standards, Kerr, in echoing Manz and Sims (1980), contended that by "evaluating their performance in terms of these standards, and by self-administering consequences based on their self-evaluations" (Manz & Sims, 1980, p. 361), followers could assume the role of organizational leadership during periods of recognized leader absence.

Drucker (2005) also spoke to the concept of self-management and expanded it to that of self-awareness, noting that in order to identify and understand one's individual strengths, one must actively engage in feedback analysis. Both leader and follower can recognize the difference between individual strengths and weaknesses, and introspective action can in turn promote opportunities to enhance strengths rather than focus on weaknesses and thus work to manipulate them into effective action. According to Drucker, "It takes far more energy to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than to improve from first-rate to excellence" (p. 102). Drucker further insisted that the ultimate components of self-awareness and self-management are one's values, and that critical to the process is the ability to do the right thing. Whether this be a leader's ability to lead for

nonselfish and organizationally-directed reasons or for the follower's ability to act on strong direction and competent guidance, achieving self-awareness extends beyond simple action and a belief that something has systematically been accomplished. Self-awareness exists as a function of sincere introspection coupled with an ongoing effort to combine the development of strengths with the minimization of weaknesses and subsequently recognition of when to act on both.

Problem Statement

Regardless of whether a leader facilitates or inhibits the ability of followers to contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives, significant concerns come to bear for followers under conditions of absent leadership. It is possible that no follower shows interest in filling the void or that the search to fill the position extends for a significant period of time. How the organization permits, encourages, or deters the follower or followers from achieving goals had there been formal leadership becomes a function of the preparation for its absence. The meaningfulness in this understanding lies in the recognition that when periods of absent leadership become extended, followers' actions can drive and ultimately become responsible for the organization's successes or failures.

There is a current gap in knowledge about absent leadership and the consequences of this absence, such as negatively impacted morale, delays in progress, and transitional costs for the organization, presented the fundamental problem of the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. Kellerman (2008) and Chaleff (1995) provided insight into how followers might provide the needed leadership and the varying ways in which those reactions subsequently impact the organization, either positively or

negatively, creating an opportunity to expand on the business problem in a way that supports the need for further study.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study, designed to interpret the texts of life (hermeneutical) and the lived experiences (phenomenology) (van Manen, 1990), was to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. Individuals and groups with the unique experience of working in an environment of absent leadership constituted the basis for this study. The environment itself was not the primary concern; rather, it was how absent leadership response is advanced. In pursuit of this understanding, I chose hermeneutical phenomenology to interpret the texts of life and the lived experiences in an effort to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership.

The role of followership during periods of absent leadership was generally defined as the concept central to the process being examined (Creswell, 2007). Existing theories on followership ranged from Kellerman's (2004, 2008) leader-follower dynamic and how that interaction creates a variety of followership roles in the relationship to Chaleff's (1995, 2008) argument that the formulation and standardization of group policies and culture is driven by positive followership. The purpose of this research was to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. The expectation was that the attainment of this purpose might help to determine the ways in which periods of absent leadership impact and form the role of followership as well as the subsequent understanding of the leader-follower relationship itself.

This was approached through a process of qualitative research designed to systematically examine the role of followership during periods of absent leadership. Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the method of interpretation. Creswell (2007) indicated that this type of phenomenology enables the researcher to focus on understanding not only how individuals, in this case the followers, experience the process but also how their actions and reactions unfold as a result. Creswell (p. 235) aligned four key steps in this form of study, including (a) *epoche* or bracketing, in which the researcher sets aside all preconceived notions pertaining to the core phenomenon to the greatest possible extent in an effort to allow for the best understanding of the participant's point of view (Moustakas, 1994); (b) horizontalization, in which every significant statement deemed relevant to the topic is listed and given equal value (Moustakas, 1994); (c) clusters of meaning, in which statements are clustered or grouped into themes or meaning units and all overlapping and repetitive statements are deleted (Moustakas, 1994); and (d) essential, invariant structure (also referred to as *essence*), in which, in an effort to reduce the meanings of the experiences into their essential structure, the textural (what) and structural (how) components of participants' experiences are reduced to brief descriptions that typify the collective experiences of all participants. This fourth step is essentially the goal of the phenomenologist (Moustakas, 1994).

This type of research, according to van Manen (1990), is not founded on a rules- or methods-based structure, but rather one that considers a dynamic interplay among several research activities. Those include (a) the core phenomenon, or "abiding concern" (p. 31); (b) a reflection on essential themes relevant to the lived experience; (c) a written

description of the phenomenon, emphasizing a balance of parts in the inquiry; and (d) an interpretation of the lived experience process. The rationale behind selecting this qualitative approach as well as an argument for the appropriateness of the chosen research methodology as a function of the method of design utilized will be discussed later.

Chapter 2 specifically focuses on the existing literature and subsequently offers insight into the connotations of leaders and followers, including the positive aspects of followers as they present themselves as potential change agents. Examples might include taking action where no action appears to be present; assuming roles of assertiveness, rationality, and integration to drive upward-led change; or, as Kellerman (2008a) stressed, simply doing something rather than nothing.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed description of the research method and also addresses the role of the researcher; confirmability, dependability, and trustworthiness; specific research questions and hypotheses; and study criteria as it specifically relates to data collection and analysis generated via dialogue and interviews with study participants. Exploration into the phenomena of lived experiences by followers when exposed to periods of absent leadership served as the basis for this investigation.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenology was to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. The research questions for this study included:

RQ 1: How do followers respond during periods of absent leadership?

RQ 2: What actions do followers take to fill the void during periods of absent leadership?

RQ 3: What is the purpose of the actions and reactions of followers during periods of absent leadership?

Operational Definitions

According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), leadership and followership are connected by four overarching themes of effective leadership, those being integrity, decisiveness, competence, and vision. Others to consider include relationships, both positive and negative, and communication. Ranging from single word terms to full phrases associated with leadership and followership, certain operational definitions should be understood in the process of studying the role of followership during periods of absent leadership. While the study was focused on the role of followership, recognition of the various forms of leadership were, at the very least, considered as well due to certain similarities and fundamental comparisons between followers and leaders, as discussed in Chapter 2. Following is a brief listing of key terminology germane to the study at hand, as well as examples and respective applications of the terms. These terms and phrases will be put into context in the chapters that follow.

Absent leadership: There is very limited research on the topic of absent leadership; in fact, in researching the leader-follower dynamic, a search for the mere definition of absent leadership proved fruitless. This lack of information presented a unique opportunity not only to discuss the role of followership during periods of absent leadership but to potentially aid in the definition of absent leadership itself. Absent

leadership is any situation where there is no direct supervisor present for an extended period of time. Either the individual was removed, voluntarily separated, or transferred, and his or her position remained vacant. The consideration of absences with regard to fundamental failures to manage, inspire, and lead with general effectiveness is a murky area of study and was not considered here. Categories such as retirement, death, and dismissal from the organization open up a wide range of situational considerations. For the purpose of this research, absent leadership was defined simply as the recognition that no formal leadership is present and that the execution of leadership functions does not exist in the form of an immediate supervisor. Absent leadership was viewed as a means of an interim position, causing a situation of waiting for the next person to fill the void. Consideration of the time period required to designate leadership as absent may vary from case to case, such as whether interim leaders will be present or not. The absence needed to be of at least 3 months to be included in this research.

Followers: Kellerman (2008a) offered that “followers are by definition in subordinate roles in which they have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors” (p. 86). Although this research may not necessarily have uncovered specific instances of the various types of followers, it did nonetheless identify the distinct types as they present themselves. The results of the research may very well lead to considerations of how various types of followers can impact organizational change due to their actions and reactions during periods of absent leadership.

Followership: In his research, Agho (2009) determined that “(a) leadership and followership are interrelated roles; (b) leadership and followership skills have to be

learned; (c) effective leaders and effective followers can influence work performance, quality of work output, satisfaction and morale, and cohesiveness of work groups; and (d) researchers have not devoted enough attention to the study of followership,” and subsequently defined followership as “the ability of an individual to competently and proactively follow the instructions and support the efforts of their superior to achieve organizational goals” (p. 159).

Leader-member exchange (LMX): Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) presented LMX as a dynamic comprising a collection of reciprocal functions based on respect, trust, and mutual obligation. This interrelated relationship contended that both the leader and the follower are essential to the organizational mission and therefore mutually responsible for the success of the relationship.

Leadership: Chemers (1997) defined leadership as a “process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (p. 1). Shared beliefs, values, and expectations of followers can all be guided and molded via effective leadership in organizations and societies alike. Followers’ subsequent and collective interpretations of events and issues develop as a byproduct of effective leadership, and those developments in turn provide a vehicle for their inspiration and dedication.

Negative relationships: In an effort to avoid over-simplification, negative relationships are those absent of the qualities of positive relationships, resulting in distrust, dissatisfaction, and chaos. Labianca and Brass (2006) posited that “negative relationships in the work setting can be a major threat to one’s financial livelihood and

emotional well-being, and possibly to the productive functioning of the organization as a whole” (p. 607).

Positive relationships: Turner (2008) suggested that positive relationships can serve as the foundation for collective flourishing as well as learning, growth, and vitality of human states. A positive relationship may be defined as simply as one involving open communication, mutual respect, mutual support, and compromise.

Assumptions

Although I discuss the following assumptions in greater detail in Chapter 2, it is important to understand first and foremost with regard to the leader side of the leader-follower equation that it was assumed, based upon the current literature, that the *leader* would be equated with other common terms such as manager and supervisor. The leader is expected to set direction and ensure compliance in efforts to achieve some common objectives. An additional and perhaps even more critical assumption, as propagated by the current literature by such authors and researchers as Lundin and Lancaster (1990), Seteroff (2003), and Bass (1998), was that a degree of interdependence exists between leaders and followers as a function of the leader-follower dynamic itself. I made assumptions as related specifically to followers as well. These included (a) the contention that people inherently associate negative connotations with the word *follower*, as argued by Riggio et al. (2008), Agho (2009), and Bennis (1994), among others; and (b) followers range in characteristics, aspirations, and action and can therefore fall into many styles and classifications, as formulated in theory by Kelley (1992), Kellerman (2008b), and Riggio et al. (2008).

Limitations

One limitation was the inability to assess the leader's function or contribution to the organization or team prior to the period of absence. Considerations in addition to the duration of absence to qualify as formal absent leadership included interim position holders if they were assigned as a caretaker for reporting purposes but had no power to take significant initiative. For example, the interim leader or caretaker, or temporary or nominal leader, would not assert his or her own agenda or be present to guide the work of followers. That person must have been doing so for a minimum of 3 months. In this scenario, it was assumed that there was minimal leadership presence.

Delimitations

A delimitation was that no fewer than five individual follower participants each from at least four organizations were to be interviewed for this study, each of whom needing to be able to speak about the impact of absent leadership via their roles as employee followers. While the follower was the focus of this study, human resources managers or other executives could be included in the interview process as intelligent observers. Participants represented different situations in potentially different industries and organizational sizes. Another delimitation was that the research was only concerned with certain levels of followers, such as professionals or white collar workers, and not blue collar or temporary followers. I hoped that through the interviewing process recurring themes, relationships, and lessons would be derived from the commentary. From this, a better understanding of follower behavior as well as insights regarding followership development might emerge, including perspectives on challenges, role

modifications, and organizational response to the absent leadership scenarios. Room for subsequent analyses and recommendations that might contribute to a refinement of the definition of absent leadership, and an understanding of it in terms of employee performance or situational outcomes, was also considered as a resulting variable that might be afforded as related to this study.

Significance of the Study

A Deeper Examination of Leaders and Followers

As noted previously, the primary purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. Through this, my objective was to comprehend the lived experience of effective followership development and to determine possible substitutes for leadership during periods of absent leadership. The situation of absent leadership was preceded by the development of a leader-follower relationship and a set of expectations that might influence follower behavior.

Anecdotal evidence, such as that presented by Bass (1998), Cohen and Fink (2002), and Kuhnert and Lewis (1987), suggested that during transitions between leaders, productivity stagnates; goals go unmet; the social system in organizational units is destabilized; and uncertainty about the work and any replacement interferes with the smooth functioning of a workplace. Conversely, such transitions may in fact have a positive effect by boosting morale and relieving tensions in an otherwise chaotic situation. This research was driven by the goal to better understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. With regard to the purpose and

problem identified previously, an underlying goal was to understand an important dimension of an increasingly common phenomenon: absent leadership.

The consideration of these issues and other questions presented earlier helped to determine if and how followers achieve organizational outcomes absent a leader. This can also be related to the entire body of self-management literature as presented by Drucker (2005), Knippenberg and Knippenberg (2005), Mumford et al. (2007), Banai, Nirenberg, and Menachem (2000), and Tesluck (2008). The idea that coordination and motivation are two significant leader services and that followers might easily provide substitutes was also considered. This examination of the role that followers play during periods of absent leadership held the potential to better comprehend the lived experience of the follower behavior.

The critical connection lay in the significance of the leader-follower dynamic and how the resulting relationship might prepare or hinder followers to ascend to leadership status when an absence of leadership occurs. The transition is more or less likely to be successful, or unsuccessful, due to this preparation. Leaders will be better able to anticipate challenges and avoid crises if they possess an ability and willingness to foster and develop meaningful leader-follower relationships, and followers who embrace the leader-follower relationship opportunity can uniquely position themselves to assume organizational responsibilities and effectively fill the void when leader absence comes into play.

A myriad of organizational opportunities exist to provide both leaders and followers with skills necessary to promote successful transitions. What is interesting to

note is that the follower might very well be prepared to not only assume the leadership role when necessary, but may have in fact been leading in a subtle way all along.

Introspection into the role that followers play during periods when no formal leadership is provided or available and when process engagement or effectiveness may be truncated as a result of leader absence formed the very premise for this research, as presented in the purpose statement. As I sought to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership, I looked at instances when there were no influences of formal leadership and, in turn, attempted to gain a better grasp on the concept of what happened during periods of absent leadership.

The Cost of Ignoring Followership

The loss of situational control and overall group cohesion are at risk when leaders actively ignore followers and their critical roles within the organization. In the case of leader absence, these risks can be significantly escalated. The leader who relies on followership to facilitate the attainment of organizational goals and processes is not necessarily an ineffective or incompetent leader. Kellerman (2008a) contended that many great leaders have recognized that followers are every bit as important as are leaders. The leader who is able to welcome, diagnose, and respond to follower input and behavior is one who will subsequently be capable of adjusting in times of need or crisis and know how to systematically demonstrate effective leadership (Kellerman, 2008b). It is an invaluable give-accept-and-act relationship that promotes the effective leader-follower relationship. If the leader-follower relationship has been well-developed, it might be fair to surmise that the opportunity for a smooth transition is enhanced.

The leader who can recognize, respond to, and apply the essential value of a team's experiences is one who can more readily garner respect and loyalty from the followership contingency. A greater collective follower contribution to the overall goals and processes can be realized, bringing about positive change and the acceptance and subsequent pursuit of clear and meaningful shared goals. The resulting product of this growth is both group and organizational effectiveness, whereby, according to Hogan and Kaiser (2005), "leadership solves the problem of how to organize collective support; consequently, it is the key to organizational effectiveness" (p. 169). As a function of the study of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership, then, it proved possible to also create greater understanding of the true value added by leaders as a key to follower development.

The art of listening and responding appropriately. Bennis (1994) contended that truthful followers and leaders who actively listen make an unbeatable combination. The significance of that truth can be an invaluable tool for leaders who strive for excellence. It is natural for followers to want to model their leaders, and the fundamental human characteristic of wanting to be recognized as one who mirrors those with influence is, in turn, a natural desire. Wang and Rode (2011) contended that "employees who experience high identification with the leader are more committed" (p. 1111) to shared objectives. Those who pursue excellence in their followership will do so honestly and with truthful feedback to their leaders, and different types of followers might elicit significantly different traits and attributes in the face of the leadership absence.

Reflection on the emergence of these characteristics was considered further in the following chapter.

Of equal importance is the observance that those who lead must do so with a sense of energy, vision, authority, and strategic direction. According to Goffee and Jones (2000), four unexpected qualities exist in those who truly inspire others. First, they are willing to show their weaknesses. Second, the timing and course of their actions is driven heavily by intuition. Third, tough empathy is paramount to managing followers. And fourth, they are capable of openly revealing what differentiates them from their followers. “Leaders need all four qualities to be truly inspirational; one or two qualities are rarely sufficient” (p. 64).

In the absence of energy, vision, authority, and strategic direction as driven by a recognized leader, I sought to determine if followers could be truly expected to respond effectively and if they could be capable of sustaining motivation and progress when a leader’s intuition and empathy were absent in the face of challenges. Followers might be grounded in a way that not only creates inner inspiration but drives organizational success as well, and perhaps the lesson learned will be that formal leader is not so critical to continued organizational progress. The leader may very well be just another member of the team and not be analogous to the coxswain of a rowing crew, whereby he or she may not be missed any more than any other member. These considerations drove the foundational interests of the research and investigation at hand.

The dynamic relationship. In consideration of these concepts and subsequent questions, it can be easily argued that the dynamic relationship between leader

development and follower contribution comprises similarities that directly benefit the group. When leaders can recognize individual strengths and weaknesses and, in turn, reflect on their own traits as group leaders, they can drive meaningful dialogue and interaction that promotes shared processes, goals, and values. Group membership is linked to personality traits, individual desires, and experiences in work and social settings (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2010). Different challenges and varying scenarios can invoke different individual actions and reactions. The leader who can effectively drive productivity at a high level concurrently with a sense of belonging to the group and commitment to the vision can establish behaviors and norms that promote meaningful group activity. Through motivation, creativity, and inspiration, exceptional followers can support this leadership and in turn provide valuable contributions to team and organizational goals.

A leader who pursues excellence can only hope to be surrounded by exceptional followers. If one is an exemplary follower, his or her bottom line value to the organization can exceed that of executive management. Chaleff (1995) spoke to the value of this level of followership, noting that “if we amplify our leaders’ strengths and modulate their weaknesses, we are the gem cutters of leadership, coaxing out its full brilliance” (p. 14). Recognition of the various characteristics, tendencies, and common actions of both leaders and followers enables one to better understand the leader-follower dynamic and its essential contribution to organizational success. In consideration of this recognition, one must next move to the position of critically understanding not only how leaders lead and why followers follow, but what roles those followers play when the

leader is no longer present. The leader may or may not prepare followers to serve in leadership roles once that leader is no longer present and to effectively and successfully drive organizational processes during periods of leader absence. Such considerations underscored the purpose of this study.

In Chapter 2 I provide insight on the leader-follower relationship, offering an in-depth review of recent and current literature regarding both leaders and followers, and I provide a strategy for searching the literature, a clear understanding of the organization of the review, and an evaluative critique of key literature presented. In Chapter 3 I discuss the research method and describe the study design and approach; the role of the researcher; questions relevant to the study; the study criteria employed for participants as well as data collection and analysis; and measures considered with regard to ethical protection of study participants. Chapter 4 will present results of the study, including clarification of the process, systems, and findings. This penultimate chapter will also reveal findings with regard to patterns, relationships, and themes discovered in the course of the research and will include tables and figures to support said findings, as appropriate to the study. Chapter 5 will provide extended discussion with regard to the research and will offer both conclusions and recommendations as well as interpretations of the findings; suggestions of implications for social change; actions to be considered in further study; and reflection on the collective research project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes a review of existing literature on the importance of the leader-follower relationship with an emphasis on the significance of the role of follower. The preponderance of the literature on the leader-follower relationship focused on the leader, leadership, and the leader's agency. Researchers usually discussed followers as dependent on the leader and not an active, independent instrument in organizational behavior. Followership has only recently been shown to be an independent, conceptually significant aspect of that relationship. The literature review was organized as follows:

1. Patterns of Thought in the Literature
2. Considerations of the Follower's Role
3. The Negative Connotations of the Word Follower
4. The Interdependence of Leaders and Followers
5. The Types, Styles, and Classes of Followers
6. The Positive Aspects and Characteristics of Followership
7. The Follower as an Agent of Change
8. Theoretical Orientation
9. Conclusions from the Literature
10. Synthesis With Regard to the Gap in the Literature

Patterns of Thought in the Literature

Searching the existing literature involved amassing volumes of information on followership, leadership, and the connectedness (or disconnectedness, in some cases) and determining common themes to establish and better understand the nature of the leader-

follower, or boss-subordinate, roles as they impact the function a *leader* plays in the organization. This research included more than 50 books and in excess of 115 journal articles, with 34 and 78 cited, respectively, resulted in the listing of more than 50 categories of thought on followership roles and subsequently the major grouping of five perspectives on followers.

The first major category was that of the negative connotations of the word *follower*, as attended to by Riggio et al. (2008); Agho (2009); Bennis (1994); Tate, Lindsay, and Hunter (2010); among others including Alcorn (1992), who found that the term follower, particularly with regard to its comparison to leadership, evoked unflattering connotations such as passivity, lack of imagination, and generally being unqualified to make judgments independently. A second category was that of the interdependence of leaders and followers. Lundin and Lancaster (1990); Seteroff (2003); Bennis (2010); Bass (1998); and others spoke to this particular area. Lundin and Lancaster (1990), for example, suggested that both leaders and followers must have vision, energy, commitment, responsibility, and the ability to act decisively.

The next category involved the types, styles, and classes of followers due to their subordinate positioning. Townsend and Gebhardt (2002); Kelley (1992); Agho (2009); and Kellerman (2008b) were among those who positioned followers into classifications based upon types, styles, and classes. Leading the charge was Kelley who, according to Riggio et al. (2008), was commonly regarded as “the seminal writer in the field of followership” (p. 67). Kelley (1992) contended that followers generally fall into three classes, those being either independent; critical thinkers; or dependent, uncritical

thinkers. From those general areas, Kelley developed the five basic styles of followers, which included conformists; alienated followers; pragmatists; passive followers; and effective/exemplary followers. A fourth category identified the positive aspects and characteristics of followers, as observed by Imoukhuede (2010); Mushonga and Torrance (2008); Kellerman (2008a); Murphy (1990); and others. Kellerman (2008a), considered by many as one of the leading voices in the argument for the value of followers, said that over the course of history those traditionally thought of as followers have served as catalysts for a considerable degree of change, rather than those in the formal leadership roles. The final category was that of the follower as an agent of change. Kellerman (2008a); Ekundayo, Damhoeri, and Ekundayo (2010); Townsend and Gebhardt (2002); Latour and Rast (2004), and others presented arguments for the follower as this agent. Ekundayo et al. (2010) referred to followers as being the initiators of change both in politics and organizations alike via creating synergy to bring groups together.

In Chapter 1, some very broad definitions of fundamental terms and topics were introduced, including leadership, absent leadership, and followership. Goldman (2011) contended that leadership is nothing more than stimulating collective movement toward a shared vision, suggesting that it is incumbent on the part of the leader to harness quality followership and leverage that contribution as a means to maintain momentum and success within an organization. This analogy offered no foundational consideration of followership when absent leadership occurs; as such, it begs the question of the study at hand, which was intended to help better understand, and provide insight into, this role during this period of leader absence.

Considerations of the Follower's Role

Kirchhubel (2010) referred to followership as “managing upwards or leading from the middle,” with a concerted willingness to “cooperate in working towards the accomplishment of the group mission, to demonstrate a high degree of teamwork, and to build cohesion within relationships of authority” (p. 18). Kirchhubel’s position, as well as that of other researchers, was considered as a springboard in the consideration of when followers must act during periods of absent leadership. Among the many questions that came to bear was that of whether or not the followers’ actions help to sustain the organizational effort when the formal leader is no longer present.

Merton (as cited in Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011, p. 2615) described leadership as nothing more than a “social exchange” while Seteroff (2003) added that “we cannot address leadership without examining followership” (p. 3), each leading to the recognition of the significance of the role of followership in its dynamic relationship with leadership. Seteroff further defined followership as “being a continuation of leadership” in which, in the case of absent leadership, “[we] carefully avoid the term followership” (p. 63). In this vein, the authors inquired about what followers become when their leader is removed, retires, or quits, and the role has not been refilled; if they are simply employees; and if they might become aimless.

Imoukhuede (2011) contended that “if leadership is influence, then followership is the willingness, ability, or capability to be influenced or to follow” (p. 15). The dissection of this definition suggested that the author believed not only that followers

have the capacity and a fundamental competency to act, but also that the use of the word *willingness* was indicative of a “readiness or consent to act in a certain way” (p. 94).

Chaleff (1995) argued vehemently that “follower is not synonymous with subordinate” (p. 15), contending that the subordinate is subject to reporting to a higher ranked individual but may very well choose to support, antagonize, or even be indifferent to the leader. “A follower shares a common purpose with the leader,” added Chaleff, and “believes in what the organization is trying to accomplish; [he or she] wants both the leader and organization to succeed, and works energetically to this end” (p. 15). While the leadership function is different from the fulfillment of a managerial role, it is commonly expected to be a desirable purpose of a manager’s role and not dependent on the presence of a separate individual to execute that function. For the purpose of this study, absent leadership occurred when the role of manager was vacant or filled with an interim appointee.

Goffee and Jones (2000) posited that nothing can be done in business without followers and that facilitating a meaningful leader-follower relationship is oftentimes contingent on equal and reciprocal exchanges. Curiously, as emphasized earlier, little is known about periods of absent leadership and what is required to insure a smooth transition. The leader has presumably developed his or her subordinates to carry on, but nothing in the literature has yet addressed this increasingly familiar phenomenon. Areas such as empowerment, motivation, and process management; the cost of ignoring followership; the art of listening and responding appropriately; and the dynamic leader-follower relationship as an organizational function were explored in this study. An

organization of the collective findings followed, through which like areas of leadership and followership were compared, incongruous areas were contrasted, and observations were made in a way that offered five key groupings to serve as the foundation for the relationship.

The Negative Connotations of the Word *Follower*

First was that of the negative connotation of the word follower. Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen (2008) were among many who contended that, in spite of the popular opinion that leadership only exists with the presence of followers, there has nonetheless been little focus on followers in consideration of the volumes of leadership literature. “This distorting and overly positive bias toward leaders predisposed the field to concentrate on what these impressive figures did to followers, not vice versa” (p. 2).

There exists a general consensus among many with regard to this perspective. Agho (2009), for example, offered that “followership, often described as the ability of individuals to competently and proactively follow the instructions and support the efforts of their superior to achieve organizational goals, has remained an under-valued and underappreciated concept among management development practitioners and researchers” (p. 59).

Bennis (1994) contributed to this view, noting that “the longer I study effective leaders, the more I am convinced of the under-appreciated importance of effective followers” (p. 1). Tate et al. (2010) further contended that the nature of followership itself fundamentally requires followers to be two things at once, possessing both charismatic and assertive characteristics while at the same time being quiet and submissive. Those

dual expectations for followers highlight the “discrepancy between traits that researchers have proposed as desirable in followers (e.g., a willingness to stand up to authority) and the traits that people associate with effective followers in reality, which describe a person who is enthusiastic about his or her job but obedient to orders” (p. 2). The conclusion to which Bennis, Tate et al., and others arrived is that the traits “people associate with followership differ from those associated with leadership, confirming the notion that people hold separate sets of assumptions and expectations for leaders and followers and that followership is not merely the opposite of leadership” (Tate et al., 2010, p. 3). These arguments prompted reflection and consideration that the follower is not only as important to the organization as is the formal leader, but perhaps more apt to possess the traits, attributes, and characteristics necessary to be flexible and capable of serving multiple purposes and layers of contribution.

According to Alcorn (1992), Agho (2009) also posited that a negative and generally unflattering connotation of the word follower not only persists but brings with it “unflattering words such as passive, low status, unimaginative, and inability to make independent judgment” (pp. 159-160). Few people even recognize followership as a meaningful characteristic of one whose aspiration is to lead others. Bass and Avolio (1993) looked at the view of the leader-follower relationship, traditionally, as being somewhat distorted with regard to the contribution to the organization’s growth, stability, and survival capabilities. Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) noted that the predominant and stereotypical view of behaviors as pertains to the leader-follower exchange relationship has become one which suggests that leaders provide an organization’s

direction and support, as well as guidance and reinforcement with regard to expected performance levels. In other words, the follower is just a player in the scenario while the leader is the sole driver and influencer of success and progress within the organization.

Perhaps the most telling and obvious observation supporting the overarching negative connotation of followership lies in the reality that, due to the misplaced assumption that people instinctively understand what is required of followers, few professional development programs are designed with the focus on developing effective skills and cultural understandings for followers. The lack of such programs might very well explain the apparent hesitancy to advocate an organizational culture shift toward followership development. What appears to be absent in these programs is a focus and a means by which followers are effectively prepared for seamless transition to effective leadership roles while at the same time still executing equally effective followership via support of their superiors. Perhaps the greatest omission from developmental programs is one of a lack of proactive documentation with regard to the collective traits and characteristics of followers and a clear differentiation of what contributes to effective followership and what, conversely, falls short.

Mushonga and Torrance (2008), in a related discussion on the Big Five Factor Model of Personality and its relationship to followership, argued that although “there is a link between leadership and followership, followership is still an understudied discipline” (p. 85). As part of a leadership-followership internet search conducted by Bjugstad (2004), a decidedly imbalanced presence of articles were found, with titles relating to leadership appearing 95,220 times while followership titles only 792 times, and of those

many centered on either spiritual or political followership, according to Bjugstad. Bjugstad's findings indicated that the overall ratio of books on leadership versus those on followership was a dramatic 120:1. "The lack of research and emphasis on followership relative to leadership in the business world is ironic considering that the two are so intertwined" (p. 315), concluded Bjugstad. This suggested that more attention to the role of followers in general was needed, not to mention the importance of those roles during periods of absent leadership.

Kellerman (2008a), recognized by many as one of the leading authorities on followership today, noted that many believe in the assumption that "to be a follower rather than a leader is to be second best" (p. 4). Kellerman took this contention a step further, suggesting that we have allowed ourselves to deliberately and willfully distance the follower from the leader in our discussion of the fundamentally dynamic relationship, purporting that "so keen are we to avoid the very idea of followership that sometimes even our reasoning is tortuous" (p. 8). Kellerman argued also that those who contend that followers only follow are gravely mistaken, and pointed to Rost (1993, p. 94), in which he wrote, "Both leaders and followers form one relationship that is leadership. There is no such thing as followership in the new school of leadership." Kellerman questioned the fundamental logic in this statement, expressing concern with the possible existence of leadership with no followership. Kellerman challenged Rost's perception of a "new school of leadership" in which the "dynamics of power, authority, and influence are endemic to the human condition" (Kellerman, 2008a, p. 8). It was interesting, Kellerman added, that "by his own testimony, each and every one of William Styron's novels

focused on one recurrent theme: the catastrophic propensity on the part of human beings to attempt to dominate one another” (p. 8).

Ricketts (2002) contributed to the argument that the term *follower* is one that carries a negative connotation and that “being a follower is second best to being a leader, that ‘playing second fiddle’ is not as important as being in a leadership position, or that following means that you aren’t as intelligent or successful as the person in the leadership position” (p. 1). In continuance of the statement, Kellerman (2008a) posited that followership as a function has always been a challenge for leaders. It is one that has historically been recognized as critical, yet today has historically been pushed aside as lacking in importance. Kellerman spoke to our country’s revolutionary inception and the rightful recognition and honoring of those who willingly and contemplatively resisted others in positions of authority, noting that there is “no glory to be had in toeing the line. In fact, the American Revolution, or, more precisely, the ideas that inspired it, created a culture in which even now, at least under certain circumstances, civil *disobedience* is more admired than is civil obedience” (p. 5).

Kellerman’s (2008a) very concerted notation that those in leadership roles have avoided the very word *follower* to the point that being referred to as a follower is nothing less than an insult. Kellerman referenced leadership expert John Gardner, citing that he disliked the word follower so much that he elected to simply avoid its use, contending that its connotations included dependence, passivity, and submissiveness to leaders. Gardner instead used the word *constituent* in his discourse. Kellerman reflected that “other students of leadership have similarly distanced themselves, on the presumption

that to be a follower is to be somehow diminished. So, in addition to constituent, euphemisms such as associate or member or subordinate have been used” (p. 5).

Imoukhuede (2011) suggested that, in general, those who have traditionally followed have been recognized as weaker and even less secure than those who lead. An unflattering perception, the connotation of followers goes so far as to suggest that they “have no minds of their own and that they are constantly under the control and whims of their so-called leaders (p. 1), condemned to a “forced condition of servitude that impedes individuality and results in the loss of identity of the person following” (p. 93). The overarching negative connotation of the word follower also suggests that the role itself has no influence and that the wide acceptance of leadership as a desired position over that of followership is a function of the ability to make and influence decisions.

Kellerman (2008a) said that “followers can be defined by their rank; they are subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors.” (p. xix). “This shift—away from leaders and toward followers with growing demands and higher expectations—is by and large a positive development. It is also a major development. It signals that to fixate on leadership at the expense of followership is to whistle against the wind” (p. 261).

The Interdependence of Leaders and Followers

In spite of the generally accepted perception that followership is secondary to leadership, the second key area in the leader-follower study was the consideration of the very interdependence of leaders and followers. Even with all the negative characteristics and traits associated with the concept of followership, the literature nonetheless offers

that leaders and followers are, to some degree, interdependent and uniquely linked. Lundin and Lancaster (1990) asked if the characteristics required of good leaders are significantly different than those needed by effective followers. Attributes such as visionary, energetic, committed, responsible, decisive, and responsible should be applicable to both. Lundin and Lancaster argued that leaders and followers alike must understand the organization's needs and goals, and that each contributor's efforts are critical to the big picture.

Sound decision-making, oftentimes as a function of teamwork, is required to achieve a high level of effective communication. Efforts cannot be deterred because of repetition of action or roadblocks, whether on the part of leaders or followers. Their enthusiasm must remain and each player, the leader and the follower as well, must act via commitment at a very strong level that contributes to their individual success as well as that of the organization itself. According to Lundin and Lancaster (1990), it is critical that both the leader and the follower be "highly responsible individuals who are willing to perform under stressful circumstances, motivated by the sense of a job well done" (p. 19).

It was Seteroff (2003) who noted that "we cannot address leadership without examining followership" (p. 3). This contention that leaders and followers must exhibit similar characteristics and attributes suggested not only a similarity between the two types of organizational functions but also that, in consideration of the parallels between the two, they may depend on one another to a significant degree. Bennis (2010) suggested that "when followers check the power of their leaders, they clearly function as leaders. Whether by augmenting the actions of their leaders or conscientiously challenging them,

followers both advance the collective enterprise and polish their own leadership skills” (p. 3). This sharing of traits and supporting attributes connects the leader-follower dynamic in a way that creates a shared, interdependent skill set and that requires one to exhibit strengths and persuasive arts when the other is lacking those very skills. This suggests that leadership is not identified by the person, but rather by the process. Hollander and Webb (1955), decades ago, argued that “leaders do command greater attention and influence, but followers can affect and even constrain leaders’ activity in more than passing ways, as has been shown in a variety of studies” (p. 71).

This process was foundational to the transformational leadership theory that Bass (1998) posited as a function of the elevation of subordinate interests on the part of the leader’s efforts to expand and drive focus on the positive aspects of the organization. That enhanced focus generates an awareness of the organization’s purpose and subsequently an acceptance of that purpose such that motivation ensues and employees put their own self-interests aside and work toward the group’s best interests. According to Wang and Rode (2010), different perspectives exist among other theorists, with counter arguments that followers must be involved in the transformational leadership function in order to fully envision the organization’s greater vision and future, and likewise connecting the organization’s mission to the individual follower’s concept of what it is (e.g., Kark & Shamir, 2002).

The result of this involvement was an enhancement in employee creativity whereby, according to Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson (2003), “transformational leaders expect followers to question assumptions, challenge the status quo, and experiment with

potentially better approaches to their work (i.e., intellectual stimulations” and “also provide followers with discretion to act and support for individual initiatives (i.e., individual consideration.” Inspired motivation is a fundamentally critical aspect of the subordinate’s contributions to the organization which, in turn, allows for the facilitation of organizational success via more ideas (Bass, 1998; Vera & Crossan, 2004).

Shamir et al., (1993) took on a broader perspective, proposing that an intrinsic motivation should result from transformational leadership and should exist as a key element of creativity (Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Shin and Zhou (2003) argued that the way one feels about his or her personal capabilities, discretion, and responsibility are connected to transformational leadership behaviors and that they are by definition uniquely associated with intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Zhou & Oldham, 2001). Ekundayo et al., (2010) looked to Kellerman as a resource by recounting her claim that “we are followers, followers are us. This does not, of course, mean that all of us follow all of the time—sometimes we lead. But all of us follow some of the time. It is the human condition” (Kellerman, 2008b, p. 93). Clearly, there has been much argument for the connectedness and mutual effectiveness of leaders and followers.

Bennis (2010b) honed in on the premise that “the moment when we realize that we are mostly followers, not leaders, is a genuine developmental milestone” (p. 3). Bennis in turn questioned: “Who forgets that painful leap over the line of demarcation between the boundless fantasies of childhood and the sober realities of an adulthood in which we never become the god we hoped to be?” (p. 3). Becoming that “god,” as Bennis put it, was to transform from the follower to the leader.

A relationship between follower and leader that leads to an importance of the followership role exists. Lundin and Lancaster (1990) believed that as we made the concerted effort to look long and hard at the thing we call leadership, we are inclined to recognize that “the success of great leaders depends on their ability to establish a base of loyal, capable, and knowledgeable followers” (p. 18). Simply put, as noted by Ricketts (2002), “a leader cannot lead without followers” (p. 1). Very few people actually lead all the time. Townsend and Gebhardt (2002) stated that “leaders also function as followers; everyone spends a portion of their day following and another portion leading” (p. 1). According to Ekundayo et al., (2010), it is the nature of the situations or circumstances themselves that some believe cause us to lead in one situation but eagerly follow in yet another.

For instance, a person who is a member of a church congregation, in which he functions as a follower, might also serve as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an organization, acting as the leader. Ekundayo et al., (2010) noted that “there is no way the term follower will become irrelevant or outmoded as advocated by Rost (2006)” (p. 2). The thought leaders and practitioners currently leading this argument, such as Kelley (1992, 1997, 1998), Chaleff (1995, 2001, 2008), and Kellerman (2004, 2008a, 2008b), are bringing credence to the argument that the effect of followership in the greater organizational structure is conceptually significant and warrants a departure from the leader-centric posture to account for followers as agents in their own right.

Kellerman (2008a, 2008b) explored the leader-follower relationship in such a way that led her to conclude that the two are inseparable. Followership itself, according to

Kellerman, is not about changing rank in order to better serve leaders but rather a focus on changing responses to that rank and the shared situation in which they exist. Ricketts (2002) added that the very word *superior* is key to the leader-follower dynamic, whereby the effectiveness of the relationship is more critical than the individual traits or skills that the leader might possess. To attain organizational goals, leaders and followers must work with a shared vision in a collaborative effort to achieve success. Ricketts noted that “at the end of the day, it is necessary for both leaders and followers to be close allies and work together to get things done” (p. 4). That collaboration, according to Bennis (2010), leads to an “interdependent dance between leaders and followers” (p. 3).

Regardless of one’s role as leader or follower, according to Chaleff (1995), a responsibility to act in accordance with both one’s position and the collective mission exists. “Whether we lead or follow, we are responsible for our own actions, and we share responsibility for the actions of those whom we can influence. All important social accomplishments require complex group effort and, therefore, leadership and followership” (p. 13). Chaleff added that the pursuit of one mission, one common purpose, is shared by leader and follower. In spite of traditional arguments that the leader-follower relationship is driven by and centered on the former, the latter, according to Chaleff, has a “great capacity to influence the relationship. Just as a leader is accountable for the actions and performance of followers, so followers are accountable for their leaders” (p. 14). Both sides of the equation must be equally committed to, and contributing to, the collective organizational goals. For this reason, the partnership between leader and follower must be very much equal in responsibility and

meaningfulness, and requiring proactivity and effectiveness. Chaleff (1995) said that “if we have followers who are partners with leaders, we will not have leaders who are tyrants” (p. 14).

A unique approach to the individual as both leader and follower was offered by Hacker (2010) in which she considered the working sheep dog as a model of the street-level public servant. In this work, Hacker presented the scenario in which the working sheep dog, “in its daily work, is sent forth by the shepherd to fetch sheep. While the dog follows the verbal and non-verbal commands of the shepherd, it also must make decisions on behalf of the flock and shepherd that will impact the sheep of the flock” (p. 51). Hacker continued with the depiction of the sheep dog as one who leads by, in fact, following. Through a process of self-selection, the sheep respond to the one which represents legitimate authority, the sheep dog. Then, “the sheep dog, using informal (instinctive) and formal (trained) discretion, guides the flock in the way the Shepherd has envisioned is best” (p. 53). Lastly, in a mirrored leader-follower individual illustration, the dog and flock are followed by the shepherd who subsequently leads by means of following and observing the whole of the process.

When followers work in a leadership manner, they are forced to not just act and do, but to lead and inspire. Antelo, Prilipko, and Sheridan-Pereira (2010), following followership pioneer Robert Kelley’s (1988) early writing on the subject, added, “Smith (1996) later on declared: ‘Today, in an effective organization, people must both think and do, manage others and manage themselves, both make decisions and do real work,’ noting that ‘few people who only follow will contribute to such organizations. Nor will

many who only lead. Instead, all must learn how to both lead and follow” (p. 1). In fact, “while leaders contribute a maximum of 20% to organizational success, followers contribute an estimated 80% of the success of the organizations” (p. 1).

Individuals can be both follower and leader at the same time, regardless of what title or tag is assigned to them. Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen (2008) applied the 4-D Followership Model to type the behavioral patterns of employees in an effort to identify strengths, weaknesses, and stressors. The intention of the research was to assist those followers who demonstrated an aspiration to greater leadership roles to accomplish the pursuit. A subordinate intention by the researchers was to help the appointed leaders mentor and develop future leaders, one follower at a time. This model will be further explored later in the chapter.

Earlier, Chaleff (1995), in an independent work, contended that “in different situations, at different times, we are all followers or leaders. The best way to learn to lead is to work closely with a capable leader” (p. 30). Chaleff added that a positive role model was not necessarily the key element in the relationship, but rather that the ability for followers to be *courageous* in their preparation to in turn become courageous leaders. This prepares the follower to lead others via a chain of authority. “The dual role of follower and leader gives us ample opportunity to learn to perform better in both roles. It is an art to move fluidly between these roles and remain consistent in our treatment of others” (p. 30).

Among the key elements of follower-to-leader development is that of influence and the understanding of how that influence impacts attainment of shared objectives.

Vroom and Jago (2007) noted that “virtually all definitions of leadership share the view that leadership involves the process of influence” (p. 17). The one common piece of the puzzle is that all leaders must have one or more followers. According to Vroom and Jago, “one person, A, leads another person, B, [only] if the actions of A modify B’s behavior in a direction desired by A” (p. 17). Paramount to this definition is the concept of intended influence in the direction desired by A. Ricketts (2002) sustained the idea by adding that “effective leadership requires good followers. Followers can be embodied in many ways: employees, constituents, stakeholders, or just individuals who believe in a cause. Leadership cannot occur without the leader-follower relationship; even so, often followers are considered less important” (p. 1).

Reed, Vidaver-Choen, and Colwell (2011) said that reciprocal values, including trust, respect, and commitment, must be considered as a function of the leader-follower exchange. Burns (1978) called these *modal values*, and noted that they must be non-negotiable in a leader-follower transaction. According to Kuhnert and Lewis (1987, p. 653), as cited by Reed et al, leadership can be both transactional and transformational in some cases, but “leaders must know the limitations, the defects, and the strengths of all perspectives” (pp. 417-418).

Riggio, Chaleff and Lipman-Blumen (2008) said that “although leadership has traditionally been defined through an assessment of an individual’s specific traits and behaviors, more contemporary leadership theorists have defined leadership as a process grown from the relationship between a leader and follower” (p. 337). The keys to leader development from the ranks of followers, according to the authors, are the importance of

building psychological ownership in followers, the importance of building trust in the leader-follower relationship, and the importance of developing and focusing on transparency. “When a leader or follower says exactly what he or she means, information flow throughout the organization is enhanced, which may not only yield new synergies but also avoid communication blockages that could ultimately result in a crisis for the organization” (p. 337).

Kellerman (2008a) observed that followers are “less likely now than they were in the past to follow orders without questions, never voice opinions, and know their place, and leaders make a mistake when they do not pay attention to and take seriously their followers” (p. xxi). It is incumbent upon a good leader to develop good followers who in turn are capable of becoming more engaged in the decision-making process of the organization, through active and productive involvement. Mushonga and Torrance (2008), in referencing the work of Buhler (1993), noted that “promoting the effectiveness of followers requires discarding the notion and misconception that leaders do all the thinking while followers simply carry out commands. The importance of cultivating effective followership has increased as organizations focus on self-managed teams as the central theme to their mission” (p. 191).

Latour and Rast (2004) added that followership is as dynamic a process as is leadership, and that skill, innovation, and conceptualization of the roles in the partnership is critical to the success of an organization’s mission. “Without followership, a leader at any level will fail to produce effective institutions. Valuing followers and their development is the first step toward cultivating effective transformational leaders—

people capable of motivating followers to achieve mission requirements in the absence of hygienic or transactional rewards (i.e., immediate payoffs for visible products)” (p. 103). Latour and Rast further contended that contemporary organizations must make a shift from transactional leadership to one of transformational followership so that leaders might be transformational as well. This is clearly an argument for the equality in value and need for followers and leaders within an organization.

Latour and Rast (2004) also posited that individuals acting as followers must be capable of seamlessly transitioning to leadership roles effectively while, in some cases, retaining the responsibilities and expectations of their roles as followers. Organizations that work to develop and facilitate this transition are ones that will drive follower competencies and therefore bridge any gaps in the leader-follower relationship, subsequently advancing critical thinking and effective action. “Leadership development experts have proposed models for identifying desirable traits in leaders; similarly, followership studies can benefit from the discipline inherent in model development. A model that concentrates on institutional values and follower abilities would provide a starting point for synergistically integrating leader-follower development programs” (p. 104). Capitalizing on a follower’s competencies gives organizations a better opportunity to share in the leadership vision and help the organization to reach and maintain mission effectiveness.

A component of this capitalization of followers’ competencies is creating an engaging work environment. Yulk (2002) claimed that it is the leader’s responsibility to make this happen through influence and a thorough understanding of how to effectively

be able to do what needs to be done. Greenberg-Walt and Robertson (1994), according to Mourino-Ruiz (2010), pointed out that collaborative leadership is “critically important particularly as organizations evolve into a global environment” (p. 36). Mourino-Ruiz also attributed Fox (2002) by noting that effectively affecting key components required of followers, such as loyalty, communication, and motivation, is a function traditionally associated with leaders, but also cited Avolio and Kahai (2004) by noting that “at the core of leadership is the development of relationships. To this end, there is an increasing need for leaders to effectively create and nurture relationships in order to achieve their objectives” (p. 36).

This interaction, referred to as Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) theory as introduced by Dansereau, Cashman, and Graen (1973), was later referred to as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). The theory posited that this interaction is made up of a set of two-way functions of trust, respect, and mutual obligation. It is an interrelated relationship whereby the leader and the follower are both critical to the mission and mutually responsible for the success of the relationship. Among the conclusions gleaned from early studies into LMX was that the leader-follower relationship exists as a continuum that ranges from low-quality to high-quality, as functions of a mere transactional exchange in the former to a more trusting and mutually respecting function in the latter (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The LMX theory underpins the study from the perspective that the very nature of the leader-follower dynamic hinges on the quality of the relationship and exchange of information, support, and communication.

When Hacker (2001) discussed the working sheep dog, she noted observations by Fairholm (2000), Heider (1985), and Vinzant and Crothers (1998) with regard to the contention that leadership philosophies, whether contemporary or ancient, clearly encourage the leader-follower relationship to be one which demonstrates and hinges on a natural flow. Hacker posited that “this transforms the sometimes mundane work of the street-level public servant into a dynamic, personal relationship between the administrative leader, followers, and public” (p. 53), and added that leadership must still exist and that someone must establish the vision.

Organizational success comes as a function of that reciprocal relationship and the acknowledgement that both the leader and the follower have key roles and value. It also depends upon each player understanding his or her own capabilities and expectations. Drucker (2005) argued that “success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves—their strengths, their values, and how they best perform” (p. 100), and “the first secret of effectiveness is to understand the people you work with so that you can make use of their strengths” (p. 107). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) added that the transformational leader is motivated by the end goals of the organization, which differs from the motivation of the servant leader whose ultimate goal, beyond serving the organization, is to assist in the leader development of his or her followers (Greenleaf, 1970, 1972).

At the base level, according to Wang and Rode (2010), the LMX environment lends itself to a transformational leadership style in which the follower identifies with the leader and the culture and climate of the organization. Scott and Bruce (1994) said that

the result of this style is a positive correlation between employee creativity and high-level leadership function which in turn creates an overall innovative climate and in turn a sense of identification between follower and leader.

A hypothesized model of this transformational leadership and the associated flow is illustrated in Figure 1:

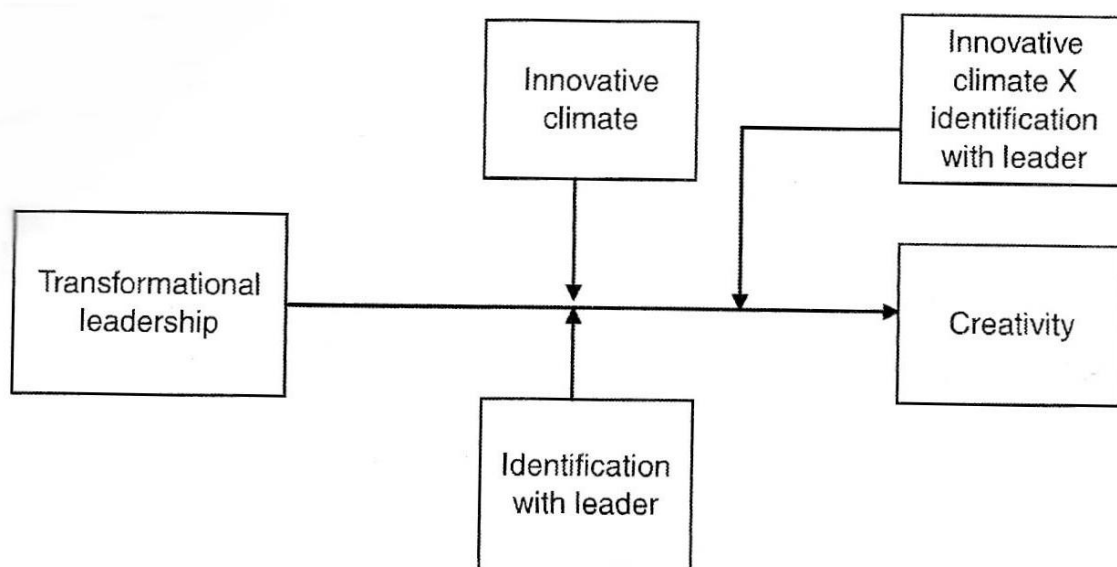


Figure 1. Hypothesized model of transformational leadership. Leader-Member Exchange and transformational leadership. Adapted from “Transformational Leadership and Follower Creativity: The Moderating Effects of Identification With Leader and Organizational Climate,” by P. Wang and J. C. Rode, 2010, *Human Relations*, 63(8), p. 1108.

The followers’ identification with the leader, coupled with the innovative climate and creativity driven by the transformational relationship, enables followership as a role to become more of a mentoring function. The followers learn to think like their leaders and, as the leader encourages and allows this individual thinking, that mimetic action exists in the ways in which followers respond to various situations. In congruence with this, Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen (2008) stated that “followers manifest

leadership itself in and through the way they respond to situations. Followers manifest leadership the way the dancers manifest the dance” (p. 23).

Kellerman (2008a) suggested that, with relationships between leaders and followers, superiors and subordinates, growing more equal over the course of the past fifty years in the workplace, organizational hierarchies have become subsequently flatter. “Some [organizations], in fact, are flat to the point where relations between leaders and followers are fluid (they trade places); and others are flat to the point of having no immediately obvious leaders (or followers) at all” (p. 243). “Such groups and organizations,” Kellerman added, “are ‘leaderless’ by design, the idea being that people are happier and more productive if they are autonomous” (p. 244).

The Types, Styles, and Classes of Followers

As illustrated, in spite of traditionally negative connotations of the term follower, the leader-follower dynamic is an interdependent scenario through which each constantly influences and impacts the other. The very nature of the leader-follower dynamic serves as an argument that without a leader, there is no one to follow and that without followers, a leader is merely existing in a solitary environment. This connection of both dependence and interdependence invited the very research at hand, that of understanding the role of the follower when no leader exists. Consideration of this relationship led logically to an investigation into the various types, styles, and classes of followers, the third key area of this followership study.

Townsend and Gebhardt (2002) cautioned against thinking of effective leadership as a function requiring followers to act as little more than Pavlovian reactors to leadership

influences. Followers who take an active role in contributing to organizational objectives tend to be more aware of the value of their function and, as a result, take ownership of their actions. This allows them to take personal pride in the art of followership, thus contributing to the “joint purpose of leadership and followership—higher levels of mission accomplishment—[and achieving it] effectively. Professionalism in followership is as important in the military service as professionalism in leadership” (p. 3).

Kelley (1992) offered that followers were either independent, critical thinkers or dependent, uncritical thinkers. Kelley’s five basic styles of followership included the conformists, or *yes-people*, who require the leader for inspiration as a result of dependence; the alienated individuals, who fall into the independent critical thinker category but are passive in the conduct of their role; the pragmatist *fence-sitters* who do only what is necessary to survive and avoid making waves in a bureaucratic organization; the passive followers who, through a need for constant supervision, are incapable of taking initiative and work in a *better-safe-than-sorry* scenario; and lastly the effective/exemplary followers, who not only can think for themselves but can also act with assertiveness and energy and are subsequently viewed as risk takers and self-starters capable of solving problems independently of the leader.

Agho (2009), as an extension of Kelley’s (1992) position, developed his views of followership and leadership through a series of interviews and observations. Table 1 illustrates how those interviewed by Agho viewed effective followership and leadership:

Table 1

Views of Participants on Followership and Leadership

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. We are all both leaders and followers, assuming different roles within our team as the circumstances dictate.	54.6	35.1	8.3	1.3
2. Leadership is more important than followership.	10.9	20.5	55.0	11.6
3. Good followership is simply doing what one is told to do.	0.3	3.0	47.4	48.7
4. Effective task accomplishment is the result of good leadership—not good followership.	2.0	16.2	61.9	17.9
5. Leadership has to be taught.	6.3	33.1	47.0	11.9
6. Everyone knows how to follow.	0.7	2.3	57.3	38.4
7. Leadership and followership are interrelated roles.	45.0	47.7	5.0	0.7
8. Researchers have paid sufficient attention to the roles followers play in the leadership process.	1.0	13.2	64.9	12.6
9. Good leadership enhances followers.	61.9	37.1	0.3	0.0
10. Good followership enhances leaders.	51.3	43.0	3.0	0.7
11. Effective followership skill is a prerequisite to be an effective leader.	19.2	55.6	20.9	1.7
12. Qualities of good followership are the same as the qualities typically associated with good leadership	3.6	40.1	46.4	6.0
13. Effective followers can influence:				
Performance of work units	49.3	49.3	0.3	0.3
Quality of work output	53.3	45.7	0.0	0.3
Worker satisfaction and morale	55.0	43.0	1.0	0.0
Work group cohesiveness	57.3	41.1	0.7	0.0
14. Effective leaders can influence:				
Performance of work units	61.6	37.4	0.0	0.3
Quality of work output	60.6	37.7	0.7	0.3
Worker satisfaction and morale	64.9	33.8	0.3	0.3
Work group cohesiveness	62.9	34.8	1.0	0.0

Note. From “Perspectives of senior-level executives on effective followership and leadership,” by A. O. Agho, 2009, *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 16, p. 164.

According to Kellerman (2008b), the classification of followers falls into five types, which she based on the various levels of engagement with leaders and their organizations. *Isolates* are followers who have detached themselves completely from the process, content to know nothing about their leaders and, subsequently, displaying no interest in responding to them. Through this lack of engagement, then, these followers

empower their leaders to go unchallenged and to lead in whatever way they choose, good or bad. In the workplace, isolates are “uninformed, uninterested, and unmotivated” (p. 91). *Bystanders* just hang in the wings, although they deserve to be involved and could be, should they so choose. They support the status quo, regardless of who or what represents it. *Participants* are at least partially engaged and, while they may be opposed to the leader or even the group itself, nonetheless offer their support. *Activists* are those followers who demonstrate a very strong opinion in favor or in opposition for the leaders or group. As a result, these followers can either genuinely support the leader or group or, conversely, very seriously undermine them. *Diehards* are the followers who will not budge in their position and will not waver from that which they support, stand for, or believe in. As an extension of Kellerman’s classifications, Ekundayo et al., (2010) indicated that “diehards can be deeply devoted to their leaders or their ideas. Viewed in another dimension, they are ready to remove these leaders by any means necessary, if they do not meet their aspirations or expectations. They are ready to risk life and limb to project their cause to a logical conclusion” (p. 5).

In addition to classifying followers, Riggio, Chaleff and Lipman-Blumen (2008) focused on how followers respond in certain situations. The overall response of followers is significant to the purpose of this research, thus offering a meaningful connection to the questions at hand in terms of how followers act during periods of absent leadership. Whether voluntarily or involuntarily, the identification and understanding of how followers respond during these periods, although not necessarily limited to the questions

that follow, will guide the research. Riggio et al., asked two key sets of questions in their research, those being:

1) Do they think for themselves? Are they independent critical thinkers? Or do they look to the leader to do the thinking for them? and 2) Are they actively engaged in creating positive energy for the organization? Or is there negative energy or passive involvement? (p. 7)

These questions posed by Riggio et al., (2008) are not necessarily comprehensive with regard to the ways, and for that matter the only ways, in which followers might respond. With no identifiable research in the area of followers' response during periods of absent leadership, one is likely to expect that additional responses may very well come into play during such scenarios. These two fundamental questions provide a foundation for the types of responses that might be considered. The organization's culture or type of leader can have an impact on these two situations. With that in mind, the interview process should present a set of questions regarding the overall climate and preparation of people to perform their work under all situations (see Appendix A). It is likely that other actions and reactions exist for the follower or group of followers in the organization where formal leadership no longer exists. This research, in its quest to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership, will in part find out if the followers fill the responsibility gap. It is also quite possible that one particular organizational environment impacts followers differently than another depending upon the culture of the organization, the hierarchical structure, and even the internal working relationships as they form the role of the follower during these absent leader scenarios.

The two concerns of followership, as posited by Riggio et al., (2008), led the authors to develop five basic styles of followership, those being sheep followers; yes-people followers; alienated followers; pragmatic followers; and star followers. The different types of followers, according to the authors, respond to leaders differently. This study held the potential to discover if the various types of followership hold form during periods of absent leadership, or if they migrate to different styles. For example, sheep followers are those who passively expect the leader to do all the thinking for them, in turn providing all the motivation for action. Sheep are passive and look to the leader to do the thinking for them and to motivate them. The leader who is constantly concerned with what the followers are going to do next and how to get them to do it, is working with sheep.

Yes-people followers always take the leader's side and always appear to be positive; however, like the sheep, they expect the leader to do all the heavy lifting, providing direction, vision, and even all the thinking. These are the followers who willingly and enthusiastically follow instructions, but as soon as the job is completed feel the need to ask, "What do you want me to do next?" Ironically, yes-people see themselves as doers because following is their job; the leader gets paid to think.

Alienated followers are capable of thinking for themselves, but they do it in a negative way. These are the followers who consistently object to forward progress, openly questioning every step in the leader's or organization's process. They do this without offering an alternative solution. Instead, alienated followers merely remain skeptical and cynical about the plan. Their energy is not in question, and they are capable

of thinking for themselves; in fact, these followers tend to be very smart. They just think of themselves as “mavericks, the only people in the organization who have the guts to stand up to the boss” (Riggio et al., 2008, p. 8).

Pragmatic followers are the fence-sitters, waiting cautiously to see which way the favored plan is headed. Once it is clear, they get on board and commit. Pragmatic followers will not be the first on board but they will make sure that the leader or the organization does not move forward without them. They are the “preservers of the status quo,” presenting the contention that, “If I got all excited every time there was a new leader or a change of direction, my wheels would be spinning constantly. Leaders come and go. New visions come and go. If I just sit here and wait it out, I won’t have to do all that work” (Riggio et al., 2008, p. 8). They tend to be survivors via necessity.

The star followers are those who think for themselves, exuding positive energy and active engagement. Independent evaluation precedes accepting and buying into a leader’s decision. Agreement with the leader results in full support, but disagreement results in challenging the leader and, when necessary, offering alternatives for constructively helping the leader and the organization reach their goals. Star followers tend to be looked upon by many as “leaders in disguise” (p. 8), but only because “those people have a hard time accepting that followers can display such independence and positive behavior. Star followers are often referred to as ‘my right-hand person’ or my ‘go-to person’” (Riggio et al., 2008, p. 8). This study presented an opportunity to produce information which suggested that followers remain true to their particular state of comfort

during periods of absent leaders, while it also provided results which indicated a shift in behavior or actions during these periods.

Beyond this, Riggio et al., (2008) constructed a 4-D Followership Model in which they categorized follower job satisfaction, productivity, and turnover rates as functions of their respective followership types. The study showed that high job satisfaction combined with low turnover and resulted in the Disciple Follower, or one who truly believes he or she is in the right place at the right time. This model, illustrated in Figure 2, lends credence to the contention that the quality of the leader-follower relationship can be critical for positive followership performance in times of crisis, such as may be the case with absent leadership.

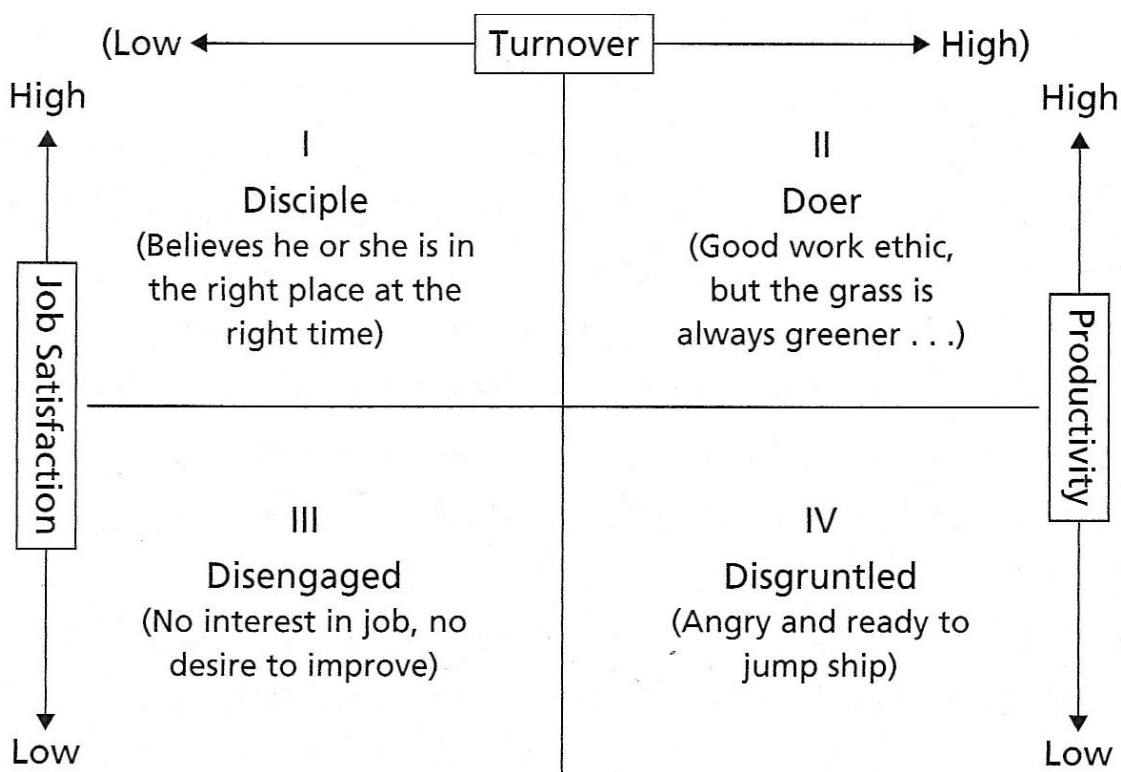


Figure 2. The 4-D followership model. Follower job satisfaction, productivity, and turnover rates as functions of their respective followership types. Adapted from "The Art

of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations,” by E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, I., & J. Lipman-Blumen, 2008. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 144.

Kelley (1992) focused on followership style and placed followers along two axes (see Figure 3) with the first being independent thinking and the second representing level of activity, as noted by Kellerman (2008). According to this model, followers considered to be exemplary are more likely to actively demonstrate independent critical thinking capabilities, which may well serve the organization during periods of absent leadership. Kellerman (2008b), expanded on Kelley’s (1992) identification of the five styles of followership. Kellerman viewed *alienated followers* as those capable of thinking freely and critically, but unwilling to act as a contributing participant in their groups and organizations. Independent thinking is a positive trait, Kellerman noted, but active engagement leaves much to be desired. Kellerman considered *exemplary followers* to be those capable of high levels of performance, exercising critical thinking independent and completely separate from the leader and the group. “They score high across the board” (p. 81).

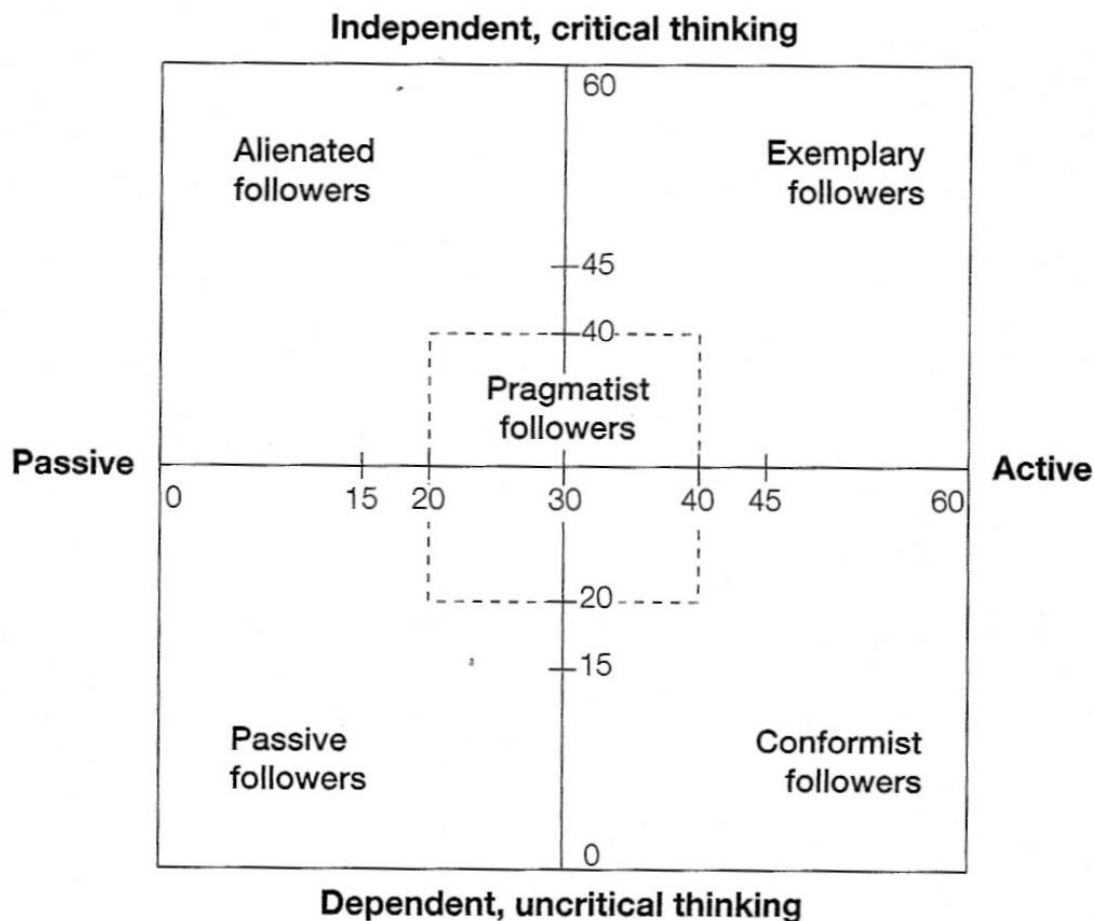


Figure 3. Robert Kelley's followership styles. The correlation of support and challenge as a function of the follower acting in the role of partner with the leader. Adapted from "The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Great Organizations," by B. Kellerman, 2008. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 81.

Kellerman (2008b) openly assessed Chaleff's (1995) work as well. Chaleff's four different followership styles included *implementers*, or those who are not only the most common in larger organizations but also those who are the go-to followers when leaders seek out people who can get the work done. Chaleff's *partners*, as observed by Kellerman, are those who offer full support to their leaders but are, at the same time, willing and ready to propose alternative solutions and challenge. *Individualists* are those

who openly and, oftentimes indiscriminately, speak their minds. They tend to withhold support for those in authoritative positions and, as a result, can find themselves marginalized. As Kellerman (2008a) summarized, *resource* followers “do an honest day’s work for a few days’ pay, but don’t go beyond the minimum expected of them” (p. 83).

For Chaleff (1995), implementers, partners, individualists, and resources are dependable, supportive, and considerate; goal-oriented risk takers; independent, self-assured, and forthright; and available to their leaders, although not committed to them, respectively. The ideologies and intentions of Kelley’s (1992) work and that of Chaleff’s are similar, with each working to overcome and counteract the leadership myth. In further work by Riggio et al., (2008), the researchers identified the follower who embodied a sense of high support and high challenge and who willingly assumed full responsibility not only for their own behavior but for that of their leader as well. This ideal follower, identified as the *partner*, represented the model position in the authors’ five key dimensions. This is a follower who demonstrates courage in several ways.

The first key characteristic of the ideal follower’s courage lies in one’s ability and willingness to support the leader and find ways to contribute in meaningful ways to that leader’s success. The second area of courage, that of assuming responsibility for the shared objectives and organizational purpose, was coupled with the ability to act regardless of whether or not instruction or direct orders had been received from the leader. Third was the courage to challenge the leader in a constructive manner if the follower was convinced that the leader’s or group’s policies or behaviors were in opposition to the organization’s mission or purpose. Next, the ideal follower

demonstrated the courage to proactively work to help transform the leader-follower relationship as well as the overall performance of the organization. Finally, the ideal follower possessed the courage to act in a moral manner and to take the necessary position, when warranted, in an effort to prevent, or at the very least refuse to participate in, unethical behavior.

Bjugstad et al., (2006) categorized followership in regard to three broad theoretical areas, representing the motivations, values and trust, and characteristics of both effective and ineffective followers. Environmental needs drive a follower's motivations, compelling a desire for a results-oriented environment with performance-related feedback. "Motivation is generated internally, and a leader merely taps into the internal power of the follower" (p. 306). The follower is motivated internally via the leader's respect and trust. In citing Mumford, Dansereau, and Yammarino (2000), Bjugstad et al., added that "motivation may also depend on the relationship between the follower and leader and how well their personal characteristics match up. If there is a similarity in values and beliefs between the follower and leader, the motivational need for empowerment may not be as high because the follower is driven by the bond with the leader" (p. 306).

Followers who are motivated primarily by ambition, according to Kelley (1998), only use followership to further personal ambitions. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory was used as a springboard by Green (2000) to discuss high levels of motivation for followers as functions of three conditions. In observation of this theory and its subsequent discussion, Bjugstad et al., (2006) observed that followers must demonstrate a confidence

in doing what needs to be done. In order to tie organizational outcomes to performance, the follower must trust in the leader, and the outcome of the performance must satisfy both the follower and the leader. Bjugstad et al., also noted that “if performance falls short, there is a good probability that one of these three conditions is not being fully met” (p. 307). Inadequate skills and/or unrealistic or unclear expectations reduce a follower’s lack of confidence, and pairing performance and outcomes can help to overcome this shortcoming. Bjugstad et al., added that “if the outcomes aren’t satisfying to followers because they aren’t finding the work itself rewarding, it might be worth investigating whether that position is matching the skills, interests, and needs of both the follower and the leader” (p. 307).

While citing Hanges, Offerman, and Day (2001), Bjugstad et al., (2006) noted that “followers’ values, in addition to other personal characteristics, can influence both their own effectiveness and the climate in which they work” (p. 308). Authentic followership is likely to increase when values, emotions, and goals are effectively modeled by leaders. Ehrhart and Klein (2001) further examined the follower-leader relationship with regard to values and personality, concluding that (1) leader behavior can elicit different responses from different followers, and (2) followers are drawn to leaders whose values matched their own. In consideration of effective followers versus ineffective followers, Kelley (1988) proposed that effective followers all exhibit four essential qualities. Bjugstad et al., (2006), broke down these qualities as follows:

Effective followers are very capable of self-management, and possess the ability to set and measure goals as well as to understand the role needed at any given time.

Effective followers also demonstrate a commitment to the organization and recognize that a purpose greater than one's own individual goals exists. Effective followers strive for maximum impact for the organization, and works to enhance their strengths while building necessary competence. In summation, Bjugstad et al., (2006) noted that "they strive to reach higher levels of performance and expand themselves" (p. 308). Effective followers demonstrate courage and honesty, and earn respect through credible actions via independent thinking, communication, and the ability to master relationship building. According to Bjugstad et al., (2006), "Kelley also stated that an effective follower exhibits enthusiasm, intelligence, and self-reliance. One of the most important characteristics of an effective follower may be the willingness to tell the truth" (p. 309). Bjugstad et al., further contended that good followers possess the confidence to speak up to their leaders when necessary.

The irony in the leader-follower dynamic, according to Bennis (2000), is that the follower who is both willing and encouraged to speak out is a reflection of the level of leadership that has been instituted by the organization. Chaleff (1995) stated that effective followers are both cooperative and collaborative, and that these were essential qualities for all human progress. These followers are capable of succeeding in spite of absent leadership because they are fundamentally committed to a principle or a purpose. Kelley's (1988) research brought to light the contention that followers believe their contributions to organizations are as valuable as that of leaders. The enthusiasm and self-reliant participation in the organization differentiates them from the appointed leaders.

Blackshear (2003) added that “the ‘ideal’ follower is willing and able to help develop and sustain the best organizational performance” (p. 25).

Quaquebeke et al., (2009) posited that “followers’ identification and satisfaction with their leaders depend on whether they perceive the values they consider ideal for a leader are represented in their actual leaders” (p. 293), concluding that when perceived leaders represent ideal leader values, follower satisfaction increases. A measure of implicit followership theories (IFTs), developed by Tate et al., (2009), identified the traits that people associate with effective followership., contending that “although previous research has attempted to define the traits of effective followers (e.g., Wernimont, 1971; Kelley, 1988), it has not done so systematically or with enough methodological rigor to be of use to future research” (p. 2). Antelo, Prilipko, and Sheridan-Pereira (2010) further argued that followers may become more proficient when they observe and model effective leadership.

The Positive Aspects and Characteristics of Followership

In consideration of the types, styles, characteristics, and classes of followers, it is arguable not only that followers may be more critical to the leader-follower relationship but also that the positive aspects of effective followership are more favorable. This constituted the fourth key area of the followership research.

The act of following can be logically looked upon as more natural than that of leading, and perhaps even as a more integral part of nature. Followership, according to Imoukhuede (2011), “begins at childhood as we follow the lead of our parents, guardians, and immediate environment. Their leadership exposes us to specific experiences that

shape the adults that we become” (p. 10). Followership is ingrained in our makeup, which is possibly why it is easier, for most people, to follow than to lead.

According to Mushonga and Torrance (2008), Howell and Costley (2001) defined followership as “an interactive role individuals play that complements the leadership role and is equivalent to it in importance for achieving group and organizational performance” (p. 186). In Howell and Costley’s own words, “the followership role includes the degree of enthusiasm, cooperation, effort, active participation, task competence, and critical thinking an individual exhibits in support of group or organizational objectives without the need for star ‘billing’” (p. 384). Kellerman (2008a) insisted that the time of the follower is now. “It’s not that over the course of human history those without power, authority, and influence have had no impact at all. In fact, some change has always been created by those in subordinate roles rather than by those in superior ones” (p. 25). Kellerman continued by noting that the difference now, in the twenty-first century, is that followers are no longer satisfied to sit on the sidelines and watch leaders call every shot, make every decision, and accept all the praise and glory of organizational work well done.

Murphy (1990) argued that effective followership requires the capacity for followers “think for themselves and have initiative, are well balanced and responsible, manage themselves well and can succeed without a strong leader” (p. 68). Consistent with this argument, Agho (2009) cited Alcorn (1992) as claiming that “essential skills of effective followers [included] cooperation, flexibility, integrity, initiative, and problem solving” (p. 160). Nolan and Harty (2001) added that “the follower recognizes the

expectations of others, is prepared to cope with educational problems, and formulates solutions in so doing” (p. 312), and Hollander (1992) added that “the role of follower can therefore be seen as holding within it potential for both assessing and taking on leadership functions. In addition to directing activity, these include decision making, goal setting, communicating, adjudicating conflict, and otherwise maintaining the enterprise” (p. 71).

Bennis (2010) said that it is much harder, in many ways, to act as a great follower than it is to act as a great leader. It has more dangers and fewer rewards, and must be exercised more subtly. “But great followership has never been more important—if only because our big problems must be solved collaboratively (leaders working in tandem with able and dedicated followers)” (p. 3). As an example, Bennis argued that no matter how charismatic or brilliant a leader might be, he or she cannot possibly solve a problem such as climate change. Only through the collective effort of “millions of creative, dedicated, and proactive individuals” can this be accomplished. “Followers who speak out show the initiative that leadership is made of” (p. 4).

In their research, Lundin and Lancaster (1990) identified several key characteristics of effective followers, including integrity, the ability to “own the territory,” versatility, and self-empowerment. “The art of followership will be recognized as equally important as leadership in unlocking the untapped potential of organizations and workers” (p. 18). Riggio et al., (2008) looked at the comparison of followers to sled dogs “whose destiny is always to look at the rear end of the dog in front of them, but never to see the wider horizon or make the decisions of the lead dog” (p. 6) as a

distasteful analogy to some, while Lundin and Lancaster articulated what, in their contention, had been quietly believed all along, that “these folks believed that being a strong #2 often allowed for greater contributions than being in the #1 spot and that making the assist was just as important as making the score. Many had no desire to be leaders” (p. 6).

There are examples throughout history of how people, in the role of followers, have ascended to great success in spite of the recognition and focus previously put on those in accepted roles of leadership. One can simply look to The Bible for examples: For more than forty years, Joshua followed Moses before leading Israel’s children into the promised land; For ten years, Elisha served Elijah before taking on his master’s responsibilities, eventually performing more miracles; Jesus’ apostle, Peter, served as a follower for three years, making many mistakes along the way, until he and the other disciples “turned the world upside down,” as written in Acts 17:6. From a more contemporary view, Hunt (2012) described the success of Valve Corporation, a multi-billion dollar private company represented by more than 300 employees and no managers. With the exception of owner Gabe Newell, Valve has an “organization chart [that] is as flat as a dead man’s EKG” (p. 2), and is completely driven by the innovation and persistence of employees who take it upon themselves to see what needs to be done, and then to get it done.

Izzo (2012) contended that business challenges and social issues alike can be managed and overcome via self-introspection and working to direct outcomes not necessarily as a leader but rather as an inspired follower. Izzo argued that once we see

ourselves as agents of change, we as followers can make a difference. In recounting instances of where no formal leader was present to take action in times of crises, Izzo offered stories of two teenagers who ignited an anti-bullying movement; a middle-aged Italian shopkeeper who took matters into his own hands and fought back against the Mafia; a mid-level executive who created a profit center out of a dying division, and more.

Latour and Rast (2004) examined a variety of research and concluded that even in scenarios when followers are not perceived as being availed to traditional leadership opportunities, several key characteristics, including loyalty and commitment to the organization, vision, and priorities; the ability to function well in environments that are change-oriented, serving as an agent of that change and demonstrating agility and fluidity between the roles of followership and leadership; a competency to function well in teams and independently, thinking critically and responsibly; and the consideration of integrity as a characteristic of paramount importance, are nonetheless present. Latour and Rast subsequently “determined that these competencies should enable followers to become leaders almost effortlessly” (p. 109).

Imoukhuede (2011) noted that “true followership is actually a tool of empowerment and a launching pad for the release of a follower’s individuality and potential” (p. 2). Imoukhuede went on to reference Latour and Rast (2004) when he noted that developing dynamic followership is a discipline. Imoukhuede, like Latour and Rast before him, looked at followership as a coupling of art and science, in which both skill and conceptualization is required. Innovation with regard to achieving organizational

missions is a quality that is perhaps even more essential than leader development. Latour and Rast (2004) clearly argued that “without followership, a leader at any level will fail to produce effective institutions. Valuing followers and their development is the first step toward cultivating effective transformational leaders” (p. 104).

Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen (2008) opined that followership is a role that is interactive, independent, and shifting. Courageous followership, according to Chaleff (1995), is “full of paradox” (p. 14). There is no consensus regarding what makes a follower truly effective or successful, while a clear vision coupled with an attraction to and understanding of a leader is generally recognized as being critical. The result is accountability on the part of the follower such that certain levels of authority are conceded while some autonomy is relinquished. Chaleff believed that “a central dichotomy of courageous followership is the need to energetically perform two opposite roles: implementer and challenger of the leader’s ideas” (p. 15). With this comes an inherent tension between group membership and the need to individually and creatively question the leader and the group; this is something that the follower must control. Chaleff (1995) also posited that crucial learning experiences can come as a result of good mentoring, but at the same time followers must accept the responsibility to coach the leader as well. “At times, courageous followers need to lead from behind, breathing life into their leader’s vision or even vision into the leader’s life” (p. 15). Top followers must grasp the perspectives of leaders and followers alike.

Insisting that the term *follower* is not one of weakness, but rather “the condition that permits leadership to exist and gives it strength,” Chaleff (1995) added that dynamic

followers recognize their own aspirations in the leader's vision" (p. 19). Chaleff believed that effective followers are intensified by the leader's action and that they commit themselves fully to objectives not because they are motivated by the leader but because they are inspired to do so. Chaleff referred to this inspiration as "the spirit of the activity [existing] within them," positing that they are "interdependent with, not dependent on, the leader. They add value to both themselves and the leader through this relationship" (p. 19). This, Chaleff said, resulted in a measurable value in the follower that comes from how completely he or she supports the leader and the organization in their pursuit of a common purpose.

Imoukhuede (2011) posited that true followership yields positive results for both the leaders and the followers. "We limit ourselves if we ignore this great principle of followership, by focusing instead on the negative effects of following incorrectly" (p. 108). Ricketts (2002) noted specific traits and qualities of effective and successful followers, including self-management and the ability to think for oneself coupled with a demonstration of strong self-efficacy; a true level of commitment to something as meaningful as the leader's vision or the organization's mission; competence and a focus on mastering relevant skills; and the courage to avoid acting as a *yes-man* and instead acting via independent, critical thinking. "Having the nerve to fight for what you believe is right, no matter the consequences" is behavior which, "while at times difficult, is often rewarded in the end" (p. 4).

This ability to think for one's self represents a significant component of the self-management issue. Banai, Nirenberg, and Menachem (2000) took the consideration of

self-management to a whole-is-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts perspective, contending that this type of team possesses qualities and characteristics beyond those of any one leader. These qualities include higher levels of productivity and a greater sense of control; more proactive initiative; increased job satisfaction; and an enhanced level of commitment to the organization. It is very possible that this concept of self-management could very well be the closest that organizations come to absent leadership over any meaningful duration of time. This concept might be reflected in action on the part of individual followers and teams alike when faced with the need for decision-making in the face of leader absence.

According to *Business.com* (2013), self-directed and self-managed teams offer significant benefits to the organization, including developing employees with a greater sense of responsibility and accountability coupled with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment; a more effective vehicle for individual creativity and team motivation; enhanced levels of project ownership as a component of employees having a stake in outcomes; and greater empowerment which, in turn, leads to increased morale. In more recent research, Kirkpatrick (2012) commented on California-based Morning Star and its founder Chris Rufer's institution of self-management, noting that when people manage themselves around sound principles, they transition into employees who are more competent and confident to make decisions in times of everyday activity and crises alike. The result for the organization was that self-management had "equipped colleagues with a common language, deepened their understanding of the principles, honed their skills around the daily execution of self-management, and given them confidence in their

natural abilities to self-manage” (p. 27). The underlying principles employed by Rufer were two fundamental concepts, one insisting that colleagues never use force against one another to sway or drive decision-making, and the other that all commitments made by one colleague to another was to be upheld.

Riggio et al., (2008), in discussing the value of self-management, introduced self-regulation as a means to bring richness and structure to one’s behavior. By focusing on self-identities, goal systems, and affective orientations, self-regulating processes give followers opportunity to influence processes and situations. The three critical concepts presented include cognitive, affective, and behavioral activities; spontaneous emergence of goals as a natural solution to sets of constraints; and the consideration that not all self-identities are likely to exist in any one situation. “In short, in many contexts the goal-based self-regulatory systems of followers provide dynamic linkages with organizational tasks and roles and with followers’ active identities” (p. 260).

The Follower as an Agent of Change

Perhaps the most important characteristic of followers is that as an agent of change. Kellerman (2008a) suggested that “followers who do something are nearly always preferred to followers who do nothing. Followers can be agents of change” (p. 241). Ekundayo et al., (2010) paid particular attention to the premise that the act of followership has made great strides globally, “as more followers around the world are creating ripples by initiating change(s) in organizations and politics especially when they synergize by coming together in groups to fight a common cause” (p. 3).

That common cause may be as fundamental as assuming a leadership pose and in turn functioning as a vehicle for change, taking action where no action appears to be present. The leader-follower dynamic, with its give and take relationship, can oftentimes be influenced by the follower as a catalyst to drive the ultimate change scenario. This follower-led action may be just one example of how followers respond during periods of absent leadership. Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, and Goodman (1997) spoke to the upward influence concept, suggesting that the various approaches, whether hard, soft, or rational, can result in different types of influence and subsequent results in behavior. The levels of assertiveness, rationality, appeal, and integration involved in the upward-led exchange can, in turn, have considerably different effects, particularly when subordinates are also colleagues.

Townsend and Gebhardt (2002) referenced an article written by Sgt. 1st Class Michael T. Woodward (1975) for the U.S. Army's *Infantry* magazine which pointed to the role of followership with regard to mission, action, and the subsequent change opportunity. Woodward pointed to commitment to the organizational mission as a critical and necessary characteristic of followers. Incumbent upon the follower is the need to understand that mission and to not only pursue but also concur with its objectives. "This simple idea is, of course, a major stumbling block in organizations that demand blind obedience from lower-level employees. Creating an environment in which employees become active, committed followers requires real effort on all sides and more than a modicum of trust" (p. 2). The concept of followership is not relegated to one of

obedience and submission, as suggested in earlier passages, but rather to the collective response to absent leadership on the part of followers that this study intends to explore.

Latour and Rast (2004) also spoke to the concept of mission achievement on the part of followers, positing that followers work to accomplish the mission, collaborating, coaching, mentoring, and leading along the way. They embrace change. “Followers are committed to constant improvement, reduction of all types of waste, and leading by example. They are the change agents” (p. 105). Chaleff (2001) challenged followers to be agents of change. In doing so, he asked followers to reflect on their alignment of self-interests with group purpose; initiative or hesitance to act and the correlation to relationships; their relative power in the scenario as a vehicle for effectively creating the needed change; trust in the leader-follower-group scenario; and if they possess the skills to effectively approach the leader without making him or her defensive. Via these lines of reflection, the follower can actively pursue change.

Chaleff (2001), in posing these introspective issues, was essentially presenting those in followership roles with an opportunity to very concertedly review individual checklists as a means to determine if, as followers, they truly possessed both the desire and the ability to be agents of change. “To be an effective change agent or partner,” Chaleff added, “we need to reconnect with what is right about the leader’s behavior” (p. 5). Chaleff firmly noted that transformation without the perception of a threat can only come from respect. Followers must consider the skills and attributes necessary to lead and how to adapt them to the environment or scenario at hand; how to modify those skills and attributes to better utilize and accomplish the organization’s mission; how to

effectively communicate the change needed; a means to evaluate pressures and challenges in order to overcome obstacles and initiate positive, meaningful change; the necessity of reduced reliance on dysfunctional behaviors; and in what ways can he or she, in the leader's self-interest, appeal in a way that would make the leader more receptive to approaching change.

In earlier work, Chaleff (1995) suggested that "growth requires motivation, especially our own internal motivation, and a commitment to the hard work needed to change comfortable behaviors and develop well-honed skills" (p. 233). As a follower, according to Chaleff, it is imperative to avoid placing too much blame on leaders for those things that go wrong. When we improve in our role as follower, we approach common purposes to which we have committed ourselves and engage in real change and subsequently the "meaningful legacy we leave in the wake of our life trajectory" (p. 233).

Theoretical Orientation

From a broad overview of the research conducted to date, several germinal researchers in the area of the leader-follower dynamic have presented considerable work which has collectively formed the existing relationship view. A strong contingency of researchers has pointed out the negative connotations of the term follower, including Riggio et al. (2008); Agho (2009); Bennis (1994); Tate et al. (2010); and Alcorn (1992). Much of this has stemmed from the lack of balance in study of the leader-follower relationship, as noted by Avolio and Bass (1998), from which a sound argument has been offered for the need to study the role of the follower to greater extent. Chaleff (1995)

went so far as to insist that the term follower should not be looked upon as synonymous with the word subordinate.

While additional leading researchers have noted the positive aspects and characteristics of followers, including Kellerman (2008a); Mushonga and Torrance (2008); Murphy (1990); and Imoukhuede (2010), others have extended the recognition to the point of positing that the characteristics required of good leaders are essentially the same as those needed of good followers (Lundin and Lancaster, 1990). Kellerman (2008a); Ekundayo, Damhoeri, and Ekundayo (2010); and Latour and Rast (2004) added that followers can be significant agents of change. Kirchhubel (2010) defined effective followership as managing upwards, while the varying styles of followers were identified by Townsend and Gebhardt (2002); Kellerman (2008b); and Kelley (1992).

These researchers, and others referenced previously, presented important issues, unique perspectives, and even controversies as related to the leader-follower dynamic. There nonetheless remains a void in the continuation of this research such that one might be able to effectively measure and perhaps even guide the role of the follower when there is no leader present in the relationship itself. This missing extension to the research was the very basis for the study, intended to shed light on this gap in the literature and, in turn, provide insight into the lived experience of the role of the follower during periods of absent leadership. A qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological research approach, formulated around the understanding of the texts of life and the lived, shared experiences as they relate to this specific phenomena of absent leadership, was implemented to pursue

a new theory based on empirical evidence uncovered via scientific research rigorously controlled to avoid bias.

Conclusions from the Literature

Armstrong (2010), in citing the scripture in Habakkuk 2:2, challenged the reader to “write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it” (p. 148). It can be argued that this applies to followers as well as leaders. Suggestions have been made time and time again that only the leader is important. If one subscribes to following that leader he or she is of less value or are lacking something of significance and importance. In reality, followers who willingly commit to the greater vision and who in turn recognize the importance of their role are equally as important. They are content to be the non-drivers, and their contributions can be immensely key to organizational success, as the driver is not always necessarily the one who is designated the leader.

It can be argued that some leaders, as Armstrong (2010) calls drivers, are not even capable of reading the maps necessary to navigate the organizational climate. There are those who do not know how to properly drive but are able to effectively decipher the map via great directional skills. These individuals, according to Armstrong, “would be productive if they joined forces and learned to serve one another, instead of being out of rank and ineffective” (p. 148). “We need people who can see a vision and let it resonate within them, then take off running with the vision burning in their hearts, no matter what part of the vision they are called to serve in” (p. 148).

It therefore becomes critical that, when a formal leadership position is left vacant for whatever reason, someone or some group must be prepared to step up and fill the role,

sharing in whatever demands exist, and being capable of seamlessly transitioning from followership to leadership. Whether followers do this, of course, depends on how well prepared they are, what their natural talents and motivations are, and whether they are committed to the work of the group. As demonstrated in the earlier discussion about the various types of followers, and the utility of those who are committed, followers make all the difference in accomplishing the work of the group, department, or organization. That, in times of absent leadership, could be a great resource to step in and seamlessly carry the group forward. What takes place during that process of substitution can be critical to the organization.

Farquhar (1995) suggested that “the interregnum (the interval between administrations) is a strategic window coinciding with a key organizational event” (p. 53). Key areas of organizational success require attention regardless of who is the leader, so what happens in that transition or during the absence of a formal leader is of major significance. It need not require crisis management skills and, in fact, can be an opportunity to promote change and to re-energize the followership. Preparing the organization for next steps and stability are measures of leading in that interregnum.

It should be noted that the interim leader who possesses designs or intentions of significant transformation was very likely atypical for the study in question, as scenarios of dysfunction or other complications in the organizational system may have come into play. Transformation driven by the interim leader, if there is one, can serve as an opportunity to legitimize and drive positive actions and reactions of the organization’s various members. According to Farquhar (1995), the follower who assumes the role of

filling absent leadership, either willingly or unwillingly, can also simply “keep the trains running. The organization can be led, or simply managed, under such conditions” (p. 53).

Farquhar (1995) asked if short-term executives might be little more than placeholders in an organization or if they truly present a legitimate leadership presence during brief periods of leadership service. This interim leadership function, oftentimes filled by a former follower, is rarely even considered as a meaningful variable when studying the impact of executive succession. Organizations that rush to replace departing executives, according to Farquhar, are doing nothing more than reinforcing the belief that interim leadership is not an equivalent of the real thing and, therefore, begs the question of the real value of followers who step up to act during periods of absent leadership. Another concern regarding interim leadership might be as simple as one of financial impact to an organization or entity. Paloma (2013) reported that three employees of the Oakdale City Manager’s Office in Oakdale, CA had been designated as “temporary, part-time, hourly employees, hired to guide the city to solvency during the absence or after the removal of certain upper-management employees.” The financial impact of that interim leadership, however, resulted in more than \$415,000 in 2011.

Whether the temporary leader is a passive placeholder or one who takes drastic action to correct a crisis-ridden or problematic situation is an important distinction. Of course there are several possible scenarios based on the nature of the followers and their preparation for the leadership vacancy, but this study only considered interim leaders who were just placeholders since the focus was on followership under conditions of absent leadership. Where drastic action is taken to prepare a work unit for a new leader or

to set a new course in the evolution of the unit's culture, that would constitute another dynamic unrelated to this research.

Observing that some temporary leaders succeed in little more than serving as hatchet-people doing the organization's dirty work, oblivious to long-range scenarios and implications, leadership potential exists nonetheless. The elevated follower, serving as temporary leader, possesses the opportunity to expand the organization's views and to use restructuring or cutbacks as a means to move forward, that forward movement potentially leading to support and increased productivity from the team. This provides an opportunity to the elevated leader to imbue a sense of productivity, teamwork, and even new confidence in the organization's situation. This also holds the possibility of subduing the emotionally traumatic experience of abrupt change and subsequently can serve as an opportunity, as suggested by Farquhar (1995), for "uniting people behind a vision of the intermediate future or celebration of the recent past; and to the extent possible, providing a unifying rationale for the interregnum" (p. 53). As noted by Burns (1978), such an accomplishment would serve as a catalyst for transformation, enabling learning and greater capabilities on an organizational level.

The interim leader can find him or herself in a unique position that holds the power to create a new leadership model, encourage previously absent dialogue, and to facilitate a new order and relationship dynamic within the ranks. Farquhar (1995) added that "the temporary executive can also guide the organization in recognizing the prior leader's legacy and in putting to rest continuing concerns about that administration. [The

interregnum] can be a landmark opportunity for the organization undergoing leadership transition” (p. 69).

Effective and sustained followership is uniquely suited for sustained leadership, and, as Goldman (2011) pointed out, “asks you to regularly look behind and insure you bring the team on board. Leadership today... means moving from empowerment (the ability to be a meaningful player in the game) to authorship (responsibility for creating the game itself)” (p. 3). Guo (2011) suggested that the transition from followership to leadership in an organizational role brings with it “a decision-making situation [that] includes several components, i.e., decision alternatives, outcomes, and states of nature” (p. 917). Referred to as one-shot decision theory, this scenario opens up alternative courses of action that the decision-maker can enact at the single time of decision. The outcome is oftentimes outside of the range of controlled variables, leaving the decision maker, in this case the new leader, at the mercy of the moment. As Guo explained, “the possible outcomes of a decision are the combined effects of a chosen alternative and the states of nature. Decision analysis involves choosing among alternatives according to some criteria” (p. 917).

It can be assumed that in most large organizations the leader’s boss will appoint an interim leader or serve in that capacity. In other organizations, followers may be left floundering and someone among them will need to quickly rise up to assume the role. One might be inclined to ask if it would be reasonable to believe that work simply continues on as it always has without interruption until the need for an intervention arises. Many potential scenarios exist. As early as the mid-20th century, Likert (1967)

offered an introduction to such a model, in which he suggested that a liaison or “linking pin” may be required, in which the organization is presented as a set of overlapping work units. From these, a member of each unit serves as the leader of a separate unit. Via this model, the responsibility of creating unity within the group as supervisor, or leader, is coupled with the dual role of representing that group with both parallel and superior management staff. As the linking pins within the organization, these individuals garner the focus of leadership development activities, and yet are not formal leaders in the traditional organizational sense. One could argue that Likert’s theory belies the frenzy for having a “leader” in the first place, suggesting an automatic replacement of an absent leader by a prepared subordinate, thus presenting yet one more potential outcome for responding to absent formal leadership.

Synthesis With Regard to the Gap in the Literature

The existing body of literature leaves a gap in fully understanding the leader-follower dynamic, that of addressing the role of the follower during periods of absent leadership. The concept itself does not exist in the literature and therefore invites this perspective. Investigation into the role of followers during periods of absent leadership provided insight into the collective possibilities which exist regarding employee behavior during periods of extended absence of leadership. Chapter 3 will outline and explain the methodology to pursue this understanding.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Overview

A qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was undertaken to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. Interviews with persons experiencing this phenomenon were conducted to obtain information regarding the lived experiences, actions and reactions, and expectations of those in followership roles during periods of absent leadership. These interviews were of an exploratory nature in an attempt to understand common themes among followers during a minimum of 3 months of absent leadership.

This chapter provides a map for the research plan, including the study design and approach; the role of the researcher; applicable questions; study criteria; and considerations regarding bias and ethics. These points along the map will guide the reader to a better understanding of this research, focusing on followership during periods of absent leadership. It will also set out the framework for the phenomenological interviews that followed.

Study Design and Approach

Creswell (2007) contended that “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). The design of this study was one of inquiring into the lived experience of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership via direct interviews. Through the collection and analysis of data, I interpreted patterns or themes. The collective voices of

the participants in the study, coupled with my reflexivity, guided the final written report, which includes a complex description and interpretation of the phenomenon as relates to the purpose statement. The end result was an extension of the current literature as well as identification of areas for future research.

Creswell (2007) supported the choice of hermeneutical phenomenology for this type of research stating that, through hermeneutical phenomenological studies, “from the structure and textural descriptions [learned via descriptions of participants’ lived experiences], the researcher then writes a composite description that presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure” (p. 62). This *essence* is captured by asking two broad, general questions (Moustakas, 1994): What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon? (p. 61). Achieving a better understanding of the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership, and then subsequently bringing forth a means to fill a gap in the understanding of this phenomenon, was the goal of this research.

Population and Sample

The population was that of followers who had experienced absent leadership in organizational environments. The sample comprised a selection of employees who had been in a position to observe and understand the organizational impact of the leader absence. In an attempt to establish triangulation as a means to alleviate superficiality or convergence on false consensus as a means to present misleading or otherwise inaccurate depictions of the organization or the scenario, the followers’ human resources (HR)

managers or other executives consented to be called upon for the purpose of injecting the perspective of an intelligent observer via his or her experience. These executives would be queried in addition to the 20 follower participants being interviewed.

A separate, yet related, series of questions designed specifically for these executives is listed Appendix B. Data collected from this group was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by me as the researcher. Collection of this second set of data allowed me to attend to the potential issues of superficiality or convergence.

Disagreements in responses were addressed via member checking, through which I solicited participants' views of the accuracy of the findings and interpretations and, in turn, established agreement and consensus on the responses in question.

A purposive sample of participants was identified by contacting the HR managers of organizations in the Baltimore-Washington, DC, metropolitan area, with varying organizational sizes and from various industries. It included no preference to nationality, race, age, or gender. Organizations recently experiencing absent leadership were identified by contacting temp-to-permanent staffing agencies such as Manpower, Kelly Services, Adecco, and Express Employment Professionals in this metropolitan area.

The research is organized as follows:

1. Research Plan
2. The Role of the Researcher
3. Interview Criteria and Process
4. Transcription of the Interviews
5. Bracketing and Member Checking

6. Qualitative Software
7. Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

The Research Plan

It was the goal of this research to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. A qualitative research method was employed in pursuit of this goal. According to Patton (2002), three kinds of qualitative data exist: interviews, observations, and documents. The open-ended interview questions were designed to yield deeper responses with regard to the participants' experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of follower behavior during periods of absent leadership.

The second and third kinds of qualitative data, observations and documents, were deemed to be neither available nor applicable in this study, for according to Creswell (2007), "inquirers rely primarily on interviews as data" and "conducting interviews seems less intrusive in phenomenological projects" (p. 143). Moustakas (1994) suggested that the researcher bring his or her own "personal experiences into the study, the recording of significant statements and meanings, and the development of descriptions to arrive at the essences of the experiences" (p. 236).

In reference to qualitative research and evaluation methods as prescribed by Patton (2002), these research activities included interviews deemed appropriate by me during the course of the study, as approved by the subjects being studied. Data acquired during this hermeneutical phenomenological study were intended to be obtained via recorded interview conversations, which I then transcribed and analyzed according to the key elements prescribed by Creswell (2007):

- Epoche or bracketing—The researcher's s preconceived notions with regard to the core phenomenon are set aside in an effort to fully comprehend the participant's point of view (Moustakas, 1994).
- Horizontalization—Every significant, relevant statement is listed and given equal value (Moustakas, 1994).
- Clusters of meaning—Statements grouped into themes and all repetitive and overlapping statements are deleted (Moustakas, 1994).
- Essential, invariant structure (essence) —The textural (what) and structural (how) components of participants' experiences are reduced to brief descriptions that illustrate the experiences of all participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The Role of the Researcher

After receiving Walden University IRB approval (Approval Number 04-07-14-0087145), I contacted participants for the purpose of conducting research interviews. Through the process of these interviews, my role as the researcher was to gather information such as the lived experiences of the subjects; the stories they could tell as a result of experiencing absent leadership; recognition of *turning points* that evolved in the telling of those stories; and the consideration of theories that might relate to each participant's life and experience during the period of absent leadership. From that point, I acted, as Creswell (2007) referred, as a "sociohistorical interpreter" (p. 206) as a means to collate, interpret, and analyze the collective data and subsequently gather substantive validation of the subject matter as it related to my own understanding of the study topic.

I also attended to the confirmability, dependability, and trustworthiness of the data collected for the purpose of gaining both definitional clarity and also agreement in subject responses. A key objective was to demonstrate that credibility or internal validity was realized such that a congruence exists and that the findings correlate to reality of the lived experience. Huberman and Miles (1994) posited that reliability is equal to the number of agreements in the study divided by the total number of agreements plus disagreements. Using this formula, I identified underlying issues and determined if the study process was reasonably stable over time and that the data were consistent and conclusive.

In this process, it was also of paramount importance to avoid preconceived notions and expectations of the study results. I concerted to the avoidance of bias and subsequently remained objective throughout the data collection and data analysis processes.

Tuchman, (as cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994), noted:

Bias in a primary source is to be expected. One allows for it and corrects it by reading another version. Even if an event is not controversial, it will have been seen and remembered from different angles of view by different observers. As the lion in Aesop said to the Man, "There are many statues of men slaying lions, but if only the lions were sculptors there might be quite a different set of statues. (p. 267)

Figure 4 illustrates the problem with assuming an objective perspective:

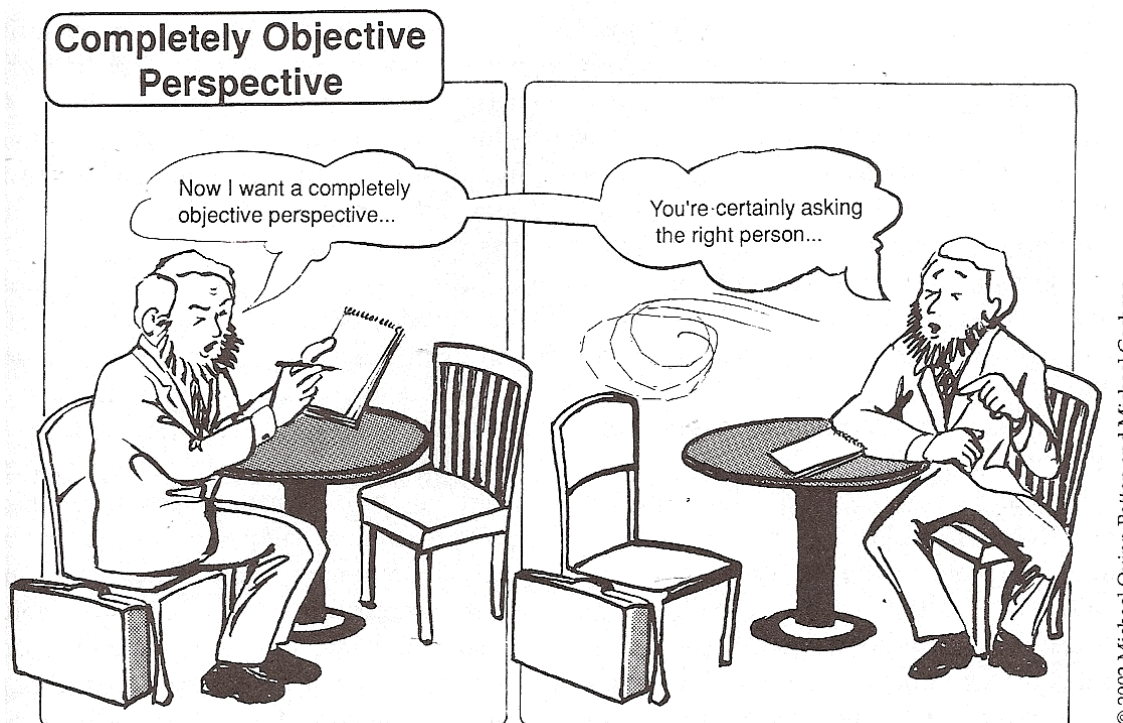


Figure 4. Completely objective perspective. Bias and the completely objective perspective on the part of the researcher. Adapted from “Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (3rd. Ed.),” by M. Q. Patton, 2002, p. 577. Reproduced with permission of SAGE Publications Inc. Books in the format Dissertation via Copyright Clearance Center.

In light of these words of wisdom, I vowed to put aside personal expectations and preconceptions in a way that allowed the interview participants to create the collective data set for this study. The objective of meaningful qualitative research was best served in this capacity. I worked diligently to avoid leading the discourse and to accept openness in conversation and responses obtained during the course of the interviews, thus allowing the interview participants to define not only the types of followers but their responses to absent leadership as well.

Interview Criteria and Process

This study examined the lived experience of followers when exposed to periods of absent leadership. I first identified at least five followers in at least four situations of absent leadership that were recent but not current, totaling at least 20 participants. As indicated previously, interviews would be conducted with HR executives, as needed, in addition to these 20 follower participants for the purpose of injecting the perspective of intelligent observers and to alleviate superficiality or convergence on false consensus. Specific inclusion criteria for the follower participants consisted of the requirement that the followers involved had experienced the situation from beginning to end and that the duration of the leader absence was of at least three months. This enabled me to establish a better understanding of the lived experiences during the period of absence in leadership. Creswell (2007) recommended that “a researcher reduce her or his entire study to a single, overarching question and several subquestions” (p. 108). That single question, as offered previously, lies in the consideration of the role of the follower during periods of absent leadership and was addressed via asking the following two key questions:

1. What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?
2. What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon?

Among the subquestions were those regarding whether a leader facilitated or inhibited the ability of followers to contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives; if behavioral characteristics and attributes from which either positive or negative substitutes for leadership emerged; whether or not followership development is a true

function of active leadership; and if formal leadership is actually required in organizational settings. In consideration of the process of looking at the structure and interpretation of texts in hermeneutical phenomenological studies, it is important to note that Creswell (2007) cited the most significant challenge to be the consideration that phenomenology requires some degree of recognition of the broader philosophical assumptions that must be identified by the researcher. “The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be the individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding” (p. 62).

Purposeful sampling facilitated more meaningful responses and helped me as researcher/analyst to acquire information-rich detail and conversation which, subsequently, reduced any temptation to generalize or extrapolate rather than analyze the findings. I thus committed to reporting both the methods and the results in the absolute context of participant reflection and to not yield to the temptation of inserting myself into the scenario and over-generalizing the responses. Patton (2002) noted that “keeping findings in context is a cardinal principle of qualitative analysis” (p. 563). Because that context of the researcher as neutral and non-contributing observer and reporter is of utmost importance to the outcome of a hermeneutical phenomenological study, I remained completely objective during the course of both the interviews and the analysis of the data obtained.

Organizations were identified by contacting HR executives to determine if their company had at least one unit that had experienced absent leadership as defined by the Study Design and Approach: Population and sample criteria. Participants for the study

(employee followers and HR executives and managers who were in the reporting position above the vacant position, as needed) were selected based on the qualifier of having served in a followership role during at least a three month period of absent leadership. The sample of employees must have been exposed to absent leadership throughout the course of the whole period. HR executives were asked to provide a list of individuals that met the inclusion criteria, to be shared with the researcher. The HR executives could also, at their discretion, send out the invitation letters on the researcher's behalf. Participants represent different situations in different industries and organizational sizes. This research was only concerned with certain levels of followers, such as professionals or white collar workers, and not blue collar or temporary followers. In consideration of the number of participants, a deeper level of inquiry was intended for the purpose of extracting the most meaningful, reliable, and comprehensive responses for data collection and analysis.

Questions and Transcriptions of the Interviews

Interviews provided the opportunity to experience a situation or action from another person's perspective. I was tasked to become an evaluator and was charged with the responsibility of presenting opportunities to better understand the interview subjects' world of experiences, challenges, and actions. Patton (2002) contended that "the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p. 341). It is with this focus in mind that the interviews were designed to evoke meaningful and thought-provoking questions coupled with active listening and a willingness to allow the interview subjects to share their stories openly and fully.

The foundation of the interview process conducted in this study was one of Patton's (2002) third alternative, the standardized open-ended interview. Via this method, carefully prepared questions were arranged such that the participants were taken through a pre-determined sequence of questions. While this process naturally limited flexibility in probing, the intention was to minimize variation in the questions posed so that data might be acquired and then reassembled into grouped categories, or clusters of meanings (Moustakas, 1994). The resulting clusters related to the core phenomena of followership during periods of absent leadership were used to in turn develop a theoretical model. As part of the data capture, interpretation of texts helped to develop this theory. One-on-one interviews served as the vehicle for data collection. When needed, tangential or expanded points for questioning were inserted by the interviewer.

This subsequently allowed the research to generate essential, invariant structure as presented via the responses, actions, and expectation of followers as they act, or react, to their role as it pertains to the scenario of absent leadership. Patton's (2002) second alternative, the general interview guide approach, was nonetheless put into play to some degree with the intention of checking off the basic set of issues and ensuring coverage of all relevant topics and subtopics. An interview guide, as further prescribed by Patton (2002), listed the questions and issues to be explored throughout the course of the interviews. Appendices A and B illustrate the basic lines of inquiry, which were utilized as the primary process for the interviewer to explore, probe, and reflect on questions pertinent to the issues in the interview queue. At these times, I reserved the right to inject

informal conversational interviewing, per Patton's description of "spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction" (p. 342).

The Interview Guide presented in Appendices A and B lists three sets of questions and potential subquestions intended for all interview participants. Participants were given a selection of 5-7 written questions designated as Set One: Profile, setting the stage for in-person discussion of the leader-follower relationship and the organization's most recent related experience. The questions comprised two groups totaling 20-25 additional questions, including Set Two: Absent Leadership, and Set Three: The Behavior of Followers and the Organization. From this approach, I was prepared to focus on the objective of this research, that being the followers' personal experiences as pertained to their roles during periods of absent leadership. Questions were designed to determine the reaction and response to absent leadership on the followers' parts; whether or not there was a change in emotional state as a result of the absence; how work was affected; how the work unit functioned; if the work unit improved or declined in cohesion and productivity; and so forth. Via this process, I expanded on any given question-and-answer volley in an effort to extract additional, more meaningful responses.

Use of the interview guide, coupled with the flexibility to insert pertinent questions as they related to the individual participants, assisted me as interviewer/evaluator in effective use of the limited time allocated for interviews, which were estimated to last approximately one hour. The guide was designed to create a more comprehensive and systematic interviewing process by delimiting in advance any questions intended for exploration.

Data was recorded in accordance with the Interview Guide as presented in Appendices A and B. Appendix A lists interview questions for follower participants. Five to seven introductory questions were asked in writing regarding the positions and roles of followers for the purpose of gathering data prior to the interviews. Such data included title, time working in the organization, primary responsibilities, perceived strengths and weaknesses, and challenges in the role. Beyond these introductory questions, two sets comprising approximately 20-25 core questions were asked of the participants verbally and individually within the framework of a standardized, open-ended process, as recommended by Patton (2002). The data were collected within the physical confines of the organizations participating in the study. Appendix B lists interview questions for HR executives, which were to be administered verbally. These questions were very similar and, in some cases, the same as those being asked of followers; however, this separate interview was designed specifically for the purpose of assisting me in alleviating superficiality or convergence in the responses provided by the follower participants.

The data were collected and captured via audio recording and was transcribed verbatim. Minimal use of field observations was used in the data collection process; instead, the majority of data was obtained via the introductory written questions and the verbally administered core questions in the interviews. In pursuit of gathering data that elicited like experiences under the basic framework and definition of phenomenological qualitative research, no less than four homogeneous interviews were conducted, with at least five follower participants in each. Additional interviews were conducted with HR managers or executives who had observed the followership activity, as deemed necessary

by me, providing opportunity for the reduction of superficiality and convergence on the part of followers in the feedback.

Bracketing and Member Checking

In hermeneutical phenomenology, bracketing (epoche) is established such that the investigator sets aside personal experiences to the best extent possible in an effort to achieve a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination. Moustakas (1994) used the word transcendental as a means to convey that “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). This research utilized this method to bracket the interviewers personal experiences to better explore the participants’ lived experiences rather than for observation to result in theoretical explanations.

As a means to establish and confirm the accuracy of a recorded interview, member checking was used. After transcription of the interviews, participants were afforded an opportunity to confirm the data collected in the interview process. Creswell (2007) noted that member checking is a process by which “the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (p. 208). Adding that this is the most critical technique for establishing this credibility, Creswell also posited that qualitative studies benefit from this process of giving participants an opportunity to “judge the accuracy and credibility” (p. 208) of the data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions as collected and prepared by the researcher. Each participant then agreed and indicated confirmation of the accuracy of what was transcribed.

The advantages to this process included giving participants an opportunity to review and challenge, as necessary, what they perceived to be incorrect interpretations; providing me as researcher/interviewer with an opportunity to better assess and understand the participant's intended response; giving participants an opportunity to volunteer additional information as desired; ensuring that the participant is in acceptance of the data collection results; and gaining a collective summary of preliminary findings.

Qualitative Software

NVivo 10 software was utilized for the purposes of organizing and analyzing the non-numerical data via classifying, sorting, and arranging information. The software allowed me to test theories, identify trends, examine relationships in the data, and combine analyses via its search engine and query functions. Using NVivo, I was able to code interviews; identify individual responses and variation of responses to each question; plot measures of mean, mode, and standard deviation; and plot Gaussian (normal) distribution.

Hermeneutical phenomenology as a qualitative research method was utilized to study the systematic reality of events as perceived by the study population to determine the textual and structural experience of the followers and how their behavior was influenced by the absence of leadership. Alignment of the questions, as illustrated in Appendix A for follower participants and in Appendix B for HR executives, guided the structure and process of interviews with the intention of yielding direct commentary from participants with regard to their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge as pertains to the study. The time between data collection and data analysis, due to the

nature of naturalistic inquiry and the potential for patterns, emerging themes, and hypotheses derived, was minimized as best possible. The data were then articulated accordingly via categorization of the data and compilation of information as pertained to participants' strategies, responses to intervening conditions, and related consequences. NVivo software was used to code interviews; identify individual responses and variation of responses to each question; plot measures of mean, mode, and standard deviation; and plot Gaussian (normal) distribution.

Discrepant causes of data were analyzed by categorizing the clusters of meanings (Moustakas, 1994) identified in responses and summarily studying potential misunderstanding in definitions, personal bias, anxiety, or lack of awareness on the part of the participants, and the possible omission of key thematic questions. As needed, additional questions were designed and revisitation of the interview process was conducted for the purpose of alleviating any gaps in data collection and analysis.

Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

Ethical considerations begin with the organizations themselves. Unless an organization represents itself as one which manages from within, engenders team autonomy, or is fundamentally built upon a structure of little or no management, it may not be prepared or otherwise eager to publicly discuss its leadership absence.

Considerations of the organization's confidentiality and/or privacy during this research was of great importance. I appreciated and recognized that the intended organizations may have objected to others, either competitive entities or its own employees and strategic partners, to be aware of the absent leadership scenarios at hand.

The participants who volunteered their participation via a Letter of Invitation and Consent (see Appendix D) were assured of confidentiality and privacy throughout the process. This letter also served to ensure agreement in the expectations and objectives of the process, and confirmed consent from both the organizations and the participating individuals as well. To further ensure the privacy and confidentiality of individual participants, the organization was asked to either forward the invitation letters to employees on my behalf or to permit me to provide invitation letters directly to intended participants. Both options alleviated the potential for perceived coercion.

Individual agreement to participant remained confidential between me and the participants. In this way, neither the HR executives nor the organizations were aware of what individuals had agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled between me and the participating individuals. No monetary remuneration or other forms of reciprocity was extended for participation in this study. While the obtainment of meaningful data was intended, participants were not obligated to discuss or otherwise divulge sensitive or otherwise personal information, if so desired. The value of a potential response versus the potential for distress on the part of the participants was considered fully. The research and interview process as well as the data gathering, analysis, and reporting was designed to prohibit deception or covert activities, or any other risks to any involved parties.

As researcher/evaluator, I attended to criteria as outlined by the American Anthropological Association (see Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) in observation of these ethical standards. Numbers or aliases were assigned to interview participants as a means to

protect their identities. The organizations themselves were offered anonymity in naming and reference in the study results. Interviewees were informed, in writing, of descriptions and expectations of their participation as voluntary, as well as the purpose of the study.

Summary and Transition to the Study Results

The completion of the full interview process, including identification of the sample participants; conducting the interviews; collection of the data; bracketing and member checking; and use of NVivo software to conduct the data analysis led to a thorough presentation of the results of this study, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The goal of this research was to better understand the role of followership during periods of absent leadership. An inspection into this phenomenon was conducted with participation from 20 volunteer subjects representing four separate organizations. Four distinctly different organizations were engaged in this study, and the period of absent leadership ranged from 6 to 12 months. The diverse organizations included health care management, real estate management, human capital management, and local government. Four separate leadership absences were studied, with the follower participants in each respective organization experiencing leader absence scenarios. When citing interview comments in the discourse that follows, anonymity of the participants is preserved via identification of followers as Follower 1 (F1), Follower 2 (F2), and so forth through F20.

Followers in the health care management organization experienced 10 months of absent leadership, the first 3 months of which were due to an abrupt departure of a disgruntled formal leader, after which an interim manager was assigned from within the organization until a formal replacement was instituted. The interim manager was charged with basic management responsibilities assigned to that of a caretaker in a temporary scenario but was not given formal organizational authority to direct followers or to propose or make significant changes in the work unit's structure. At the end of the period of absent leadership, an administrator from outside the organization was assigned to lead the group.

Followers in the real estate management scenario experienced 6 months of absent leadership during which no formal replacement was made to the vacant leadership position. During the absence, employees were asked to fill in expected tasks and duties in any manner possible. Eventually, the owner of the organization assumed formal leadership of the group.

Followers in the human capital management organization experienced 7 months of absent leadership, during which no formal leader in was in place. The scenario of having absolutely no leadership position established for the duration of the absent leader period, as compared to those scenarios where eventual replacements were made, produced decidedly different experiences for the followers involved.

Followers in the local government organization experienced 12 months of absent leadership. An acting manager was put into place shortly following the initiation of the absence as a means to provide a voice for the group, similar to the caretaker role in the health care management organization; however, the purpose of this role was to manage flow and processes rather than to serve as a formal leader of the group, which was considered typical of the organization's response to ongoing leadership absences. At the conclusion of the absent leadership period, a member of the group was promoted to a formal leadership role.

This chapter presents the various steps through which I transitioned from the completion of the full interview process and data collection, use of NVivo software to process the data analysis, bracketing, and member checking associated with this study.

The predesigned interview questionnaire provided direction for inquiry based on a focus of the established research questions, those being:

RQ 1: How do followers respond during periods of absent leadership?

RQ 2: What actions do followers take to fill the void during periods of absent leadership?

RQ 3: What is the purpose of the actions and reactions of followers during periods of absent leadership?

Responses to these questions led to several key themes in the study of followership during periods of absent leadership. Those themes, which were observed via horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) to give equal weight and value and which are listed below, formed the basis for grouping and subsequently examining the lived experiences of the follower participants:

- The perceived impact on productivity, morale, direction, and interpersonal behavior;
- The perceived impact on empowerment and decision making capabilities;
- New responsibilities, skill sets, and adjustments made during the absence, if any;
- The overall experience of ongoing work without a designated leader;
- The relationship between leaders and followers as a theoretical construct of participants' experience during the leadership absence;
- The positive or negative aspects, if any, of having no formal leader;
- The meaning of absent leadership as relates to the followers' experience.

Based on analysis of the data collected and the themes that emerged, areas of focus presented in this chapter include process; systems; findings; evidence of quality; and outcomes.

Process

Specific participation criteria for the followers included the requirement that they had experienced the situation of absent leadership from beginning to end and that the duration of the leader absence be of at least 3 months. A 30-item standardized open-ended interview questionnaire was used to gather feedback from the 20 volunteer participants, who represented organizations in health care management, real estate management, human capital management, and local government.

A qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological methodology was used to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership in an effort to obtain insight on the lived experiences, actions and reactions, and expectations of those in followership roles during periods of absent leadership. The study design was one of inquiring into the followers' lived experiences of the phenomena via direct interviews whereby the collective voices of the participants in the study, coupled with the reflexivity on my part as the researcher, was used to guide the final analysis. This process was supported by Creswell (2007), who indicated that through hermeneutical phenomenological studies, "from the structure and textural descriptions [learned via descriptions of participants' lived experiences], the researcher then writes a composite description that presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure" (p. 62). This *essence* was captured by asking two broad, general questions

(Moustakas, 1994): What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon? (p. 61).

From these core questions, I focused on the common themes, as derived and referenced previously, which evolved in an effort to capture the feelings and impact of the lived experience among followers during the period of absent leadership. The 30 initial questions, designed to encourage broad description and telling of the lived experience, provided depth to the core focus, from which I was able to use the descriptions of the experiences and subsequently bring forth a means to fill a gap in the understanding of the phenomenon of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership.

The 20 followers offered feedback and introspection regarding their experience of absent leadership and, in the course of doing so, provided the responses used to generate data pertinent to the research. I transcribed the interviews from electronic recordings into Microsoft Word format and then imported the interviews into NVivo software for analysis. During the interview process, I kept a personal journal to note key feedback, feelings expressed, evolving themes, and expectations of the individual participants, and identified areas in which I anticipated outcomes and reflected on my personal introspection into the phenomena as researcher/investigator. Bracketing, also referred to as *epoche* in hermeneutical phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), was concertedly enlisted as a means to ensure that I set aside personal experiences to the best extent possible in an effort to achieve a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination during

this interview process. This allowed for better exploration of the participants' lived experiences, intended to isolate expectations and biases from the research. For example, I processed followers' responses with regard to their lived experiences while internally recalling personal experiences of absent leadership, noting similarities as well as new perspectives on the scenarios.

Member checking was also implemented as a means to establish and confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interviews. Through this process, each individual participant was afforded an opportunity to review and confirm the data collected from the interviews as a means to ensure accuracy of the information collected. This not only confirmed accuracy of the interview transcripts but also the veracity of my interpretations of each follower's responses in the initial interviews. Considered to be "the most critical technique for establishing this credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314), qualitative studies benefit from this process of judging and confirming the data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions as collected and prepared by the researcher.

As a means to alleviate superficiality or convergence on false consensus amongst individuals, whereby misleading or otherwise inaccurate depictions of any of the four represented organizations might surface, I had prepared a secondary interview questionnaire designed for the followers' HR managers or other executives for the purpose of injecting the perspective of an intelligent observer via his or her experience. This form of inquiry, known as data triangulation, leverages the use of more than one data source in a study and proved useful in the validation of follower responses. Via HR feedback, it was judged that no such convergence existed on the part of the individual

follower participants, thus confirming experiential accuracy of the participants' responses.

Systems

NVivo software was used as the system for organizing and analyzing the non-numerical data and emerging understandings, and included a reflective research journal and memoing. The clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994), representing grouped themes of information related to the core phenomena of followership during periods of absent leadership, were based primarily on the sequence of questions outlined in the interview questionnaire. These clusters were categorized via horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), whereby every significant, relevant statement was listed and given equal value. Several themes on the part of the followers were recognized, which included the following:

- The perceived impact on productivity, morale, direction, and interpersonal behavior;
- The perceived impact on empowerment and decision making capabilities;
- New responsibilities, skill sets, and adjustments made during the absence, if any;
- The overall experience of ongoing work without a designated leader;
- The relationship between leaders and followers as a theoretical construct of participants' experience during the leadership absence;
- The positive or negative aspects, if any, of having no formal leader;
- The meaning of absent leadership as relates to the followers' experience.

The software allowed the testing of theories, identification of trends, examination of relationships in the data, and the combining of analyses via its search engine and query functions. Upon import of the various interview sources, interviews were coded via nodes representing the common themes as presented via the individual responses. This further permitted identification of variation of responses to each question when applicable. Using the source information entered into the NVivo software, I was able to generate a word frequency query of the term *absent leadership* which illustrated the relationship between leadership and followership as well as common words and descriptions as provided by the participants. These connections helped to describe and expand on followers' perceptions of the experience and to suggest conceptual relationships amongst their perceptions. This subsequently helped form a visual representation of the perceptions, terminology, and relationship associations as perceived by the followers, which in turn would later be used to connect themes, experiential impact on the followers, and feelings about the overall lived experience in the data analysis process.

Figure 5 depicts the word frequency query of the term *absent leadership*, as generated via the source data entered into NVivo. Reference to this word association model during the data analysis process allowed a better understanding and means to relate to the connections each participant had with their individual lived experiences, such as in how the followers associated absent leadership with opportunity for substitute processes, how perception of the scenario related to potential for follower behavior, and how lack of formal leadership influenced individual and group activity.

Findings

The research design, as outlined in Chapter 3, was one of qualitative research intended to better understand the lived experiences of followership during periods of absent leadership via direct interviews. Collection and analysis of the data enabled me to interpret patterns or themes and, coupled with reflexivity, to interpret the phenomenon as a function of the collective voices of the participants in the study.

The findings emerged from the interviews. The research problem statement, as presented in Chapter 1, suggested that significant concerns come to bear under conditions of absent leadership regardless of whether or not a leader facilitates or inhibits the ability of followers to contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives. The investigation enabled me to examine subordinates in situations of absent leadership and to learn about their actions and responses through their lived experience and, perhaps even more importantly, to determine the role and importance of the leader and even whether or not the leader is even necessary as perceived by followers. The interview questions were designed to address the key considerations related to the research questions and to close the gap in knowledge about absent leadership and its consequences.

The three key research questions were designed to understand the role of followership under conditions of absent leadership. To reiterate those questions:

RQ 1: How do followers respond during periods of absent leadership?

RQ 2: What actions do followers take to fill the void during periods of absent leadership?

RQ 3: What is the purpose of the actions and reactions of followers during periods of absent leadership?

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes by Organization

Inquiry into the impact of the overall leadership absence scenarios provided a wide range of responses across the four different organizations. The absence of leadership in the health care management organization occurred as the result of an abrupt departure of a disgruntled formal leader and lasted initially for 3 months, after which an interim manager was assigned from within the organization until a formal replacement was instituted for a total of 10 months in the scenario. From a group of seven followers, five participated in the study. Followers indicated a general sense of lack of preparation for how to proceed with organizational operations due to the unexpected sudden absence. However, the followers tended to sense varying levels of disruption to processes highlighted by a lack of order and follow through and, in most cases, reported a more satisfactory workplace experience. One participant noted that “most of [the disruption] was due to the fact that the person hid all the records of how previous events were handled. She had an axe to grind” (participant F5, April 29, 2014). The followers did not identify the departing absent leader’s action as personal toward them as individuals, but rather toward the organization as a whole.

Responses to the absent leadership scenarios regarding the perceived sense of disruption to the group and the organization itself included some followers who were proactive in filling the void and their subsequent dissatisfaction with group members causing more work on the part of others as a by choosing to take advantage of the

absence of leadership and putting forth less effort. Those who indicated a desire to make efforts above and beyond the norm were left with feelings of frustration and disappointment in the lost opportunities for group and organizational growth. “Some of us responded well,” offered one follower, “and others seemed to see it as an opportunity to slack off” (participant F10, May 5, 2014). Those who embraced the opportunity outweighed those who did not, and an enhanced attention to communication within the group unit as well as a much greater sense of a more smoothly running operation resulted, overcoming early concerns regarding efficiencies, accountability, and attitude. “Our team,” noted one follower, “was great with communicating with each other [regarding] things to do, meeting deadlines, taking initiative on projects, and accomplishing them individually and together” (participant F8, June 2, 2014). Thus, it seemed the influence of a few who took the initiative encouraged the others to follow, representing a form of emergent leadership that served the group and the organization well in maintaining continuity of getting the work done.

Frustration with organizational constraints, however, came into play for several of the followers as, in spite of the perceived improvement in group communication and acceptance of new responsibilities, work “regressed as we came to realize we can work as a team, but without formal leadership [the organization] put a lot of limits on us” (participant F16, May 26, 2014). The contradiction of perceived improvements in group communication with the limitations to move beyond basic expectations in the absence of a formal leader led to increased levels of frustration, a position that was revealed during the member checking process in which followers were given opportunity to confirm and

elaborate on their initial interview responses. Those limits primarily existed in the form of followers' inability to drive decision making processes without a formal leader to review, approve, and sign off on activities. One participant contended, however, that the experience of working during a period of absent leadership "was amazingly productive, considering the circumstances" (participant F5, April 29, 2014).

In addition to mixed opinions on productivity within the group, other dominant patterns and themes that emerged from the five interviews in the health care management organization included perceived improvement in the level of morale amongst the followers after the arrival of the interim manager. "It was very high when it was loosely managed by the interim administrator," one follower noted, "higher than I had ever seen it before" (participant F5, April 29, 2014). The re-emergence of a leadership position, even with the understanding that it was temporary and loosely structured, provided followers with a reassurance that an appointed decision maker was once again in place. At times, direction was questioned as the interim leader appeared to be more of a figurehead than an actual leader and, as a result, "sometimes confusion ensued but the team would come together and figure out what needed to be done [even] without the interim leader's input" (participant F10, May 5, 2014). In discussing this dynamic, what was interesting in the health care management organization was that seemingly just the presence of an appointed leader gave the followers the boost in morale and the confidence to make decisions even if they did not feel compelled to utilize the interim manager as a resource. "We worked through group consensus mostly," noted one follower, adding "I think we were more productive this way" (participant F8, June 2,

2014). In support of this, another follower added that “[the] team seemed to be able to make decisions quicker with agreement and alignment” (participant F3, April 28, 2014).

Also revealed in the health care management organization was the perception of heightened levels of empowerment within the group unit and for the followers as individuals. “We were forced to work independently which empowered our abilities to do so” (participant F8, June 2, 2014). “Absolutely,” added another follower, “there was empowerment and a new sense of pride” (participant F5, April 29, 2014). Even with the interim manager in place, followers exercised their responsibilities independently of formal leadership and noted that they “had more power when [their] decisions weren’t constantly questioned” (participant F17, May 26, 2014). Followers experienced “fewer conflicts” (participant F5, April 29, 2014) during the period as well. The “previous director would assign leadership [responsibilities] to separate followers on separate tasks. That’s why the wheels kept turning in his absence. And our followers naturally picked up any slack” (participant F16, May 26, 2014).

Time management skills and personal ownership of responsibilities were approached differently by the various followers. “Making day-to-day decisions and knowing what issues to forward was key. Overall, staff rose to the challenge” (participant F5, April 29, 2014). Followers reported varying individual performance levels as a result of the scenario. “Some followers continued to perform as usual while others tended to let absence of formal leadership lull them into a more relaxed work state which sometimes leads to decreases in work performance” (participant F16, May 26, 2014). Others, however, responded to the situation with a conviction to improve their individual work

practices. “I definitely learned to manage my own work better without being hounded to get things done,” (participant F10, May 5, 2014). Some followers also observed a potential evolution of the next line of leadership within the group, noting “I’ve seen some of the people just go along and not really care but others want to step up and move the cause forward. Those are the people who should be the next leaders” (participant F17, May 26, 2014), and recognized that “not everybody wants to be a leader and shouldn’t be anyway. The followers who cared enough to work harder are the ones who the organization should pay attention to because they helped keep things going” (participant F8, June 2, 2014).

In the real estate management scenario, the leadership absence lasted 6 months. From a group of 6 followers experiencing the phenomena, five participated in the study. Followers generally suggested a reduced sense of tenseness, a reduction in stress, and equal levels of contribution from group members during the absent leadership situation, and indicated that the experience led to musings as to the overall value of formal leadership in the organization. Revealing very different results as compared to the health care management organization, key responses from followers in the real estate management organization included individual followers taking strides to contribute in whatever way was deemed necessary, leading to an enhanced sense of pride and self-worth in the organization. A streamlining of processes and an enhanced ability to produce at a higher level during the absent leadership period were also reported. Several followers began to question the need for formal leadership at all within the group and the organization, expressing the opinion that employees are not exceedingly different in job

responsibility and that they “sometimes get on pretty level playing fields. In [this industry’s] work, [I] don’t know if [leaders and followers] are all that different. One person might get the spotlight and the credit but everyone needs to be a leader in terms of bringing something of value to the table” (participant F18, May 26, 2014).

Dominant patterns and themes that emerged from the five interviews in the real estate management organization included relatively stabilized productivity, significant improvements in morale and the ability to make decisions and implement processes, and an enhanced sense of empowerment. One follower noted that the group unit “came up with more ideas and it was much less stressful” (participant F19, May 26, 2014).

Productivity levels remained relatively the same as prior to the absent leadership scenario, and the individuals found themselves working more closely together to accomplish tasks, “like [they] didn’t even need a top manager” (participant F11, May 5, 2014). “There wasn’t that constant back and forth [with a formal leader]. We could just make decisions” (participant F9, June 2, 2014).

Morale was deemed “higher when there was no formal leader,” (participant F12, May 5, 2014), attributed to the absence of micro-management and a perceived “freedom to make decisions” (participant F11, May 5, 2014). Decisions were made mostly by committee, with a senior member of the group oftentimes taking the lead in an informal role. A sense of making “smart, sometimes even smarter, decisions on [our] own” was recognized by the followers, indicating that “it always helps to have someone to go to but we don’t really need a single leader as a figurehead. We’re not that type of organization” (participant F19, May 26, 2014). This opinion, expressed to some degree by most of the

followers in the real estate organization, was attributable to the relative commonality in roles and responsibilities of employees throughout the organization, regardless of formal title.

With the formal chain of command removed during the period of absent leadership, the perception of empowerment increased. “With increased ability to make decisions, there is an increased sense of self-worth and therefore empowerment” (participant F11, May 5, 2014). It was in this industry that followers most often suggested the organization could succeed without formal leadership due to the relatively equal levels of responsibility and duties throughout the organization, regardless of job title. “Followers took more ownership in their jobs” (participant F9, June 2, 2014).

Followers in the human capital management organization experienced absent formal leadership for a period of 7 months. Of the eight members affected by the scenario, five participating followers discussed concern with the organization’s response to the effect the leadership absence was having on the group. The group realized lower productivity, a decreased sense of morale, a greater sense of loss in direction, and considerable concern that the organization was neither aware of, nor concerned about, the effects of the leadership absence. While seemingly counterintuitive to expected organizational practices, these impressions were formed in consideration of followers’ observations that the organization provided no feedback when asked for direction during the absence. Only after the eventual formal leader was put into place did the organization attempt to create joint efforts for formal leadership replacement in a pilot mode. The pilot only selected one individual from the group and that individual’s usual responsibilities

were assumed by the remaining members. The changes were placed on hold and the overall communication was not shared with the entire organization.

Of the dominant patterns and themes that emerged from the five interviews in the human capital management organization, a significant decrease in productivity was recognized by most followers during the period of absent leadership. This was considered to be a factor of the perceived lack of feedback, direction, and recognition of the individuals' and group's challenges on the part of the organization itself. "The company did not respond well to [us] not having a leader in place or to how well we were able to work together without [one]. And then they didn't seem to really take any action to make changes afterwards" (participant F13, May 12, 2014). The collective sense of apathy on the part of the organization, as observed by each of the five followers, subsequently led to a degradation of morale within the group. While one follower attributed the decrease in morale to a contention that "everyone was fond of the previous leader and hated to see him go," (participant F3, April 28, 2014), the overwhelming argument was that "the team began to wonder about the company's direction and if [their] jobs were secure because it didn't seem all that urgent or important to get the right person in place" (participant F4, April 28, 2014).

The lack of organizational response and communication with the followers experiencing the absent leadership situation also led to a reduced level of decision making within the group. While "the most senior member usually tried to drive the bus [sic] and we would vote on things a lot, sometimes that worked really well and sometimes we had trouble coming to solutions" (participant F13, May 12, 2014).

Frustration set in for the group members and some followers adopted an attitude of desperation. As one follower noted, “sometimes you hope someone else will step up, someone more senior than you, and do the job or take the lead, and other times you just make your best guess about what should be done and then do it” (participant F13, May 12, 2014). Such attitudes subsequently began to produce negative results. “By most, the attempt was there to do and make the right choices but it was a struggle. Everything always seemed to be behind or lacking in some way with the business” (participant F3, April 29, 2014).

A perceived need for formal leadership on the part of the followers eventually arose. “We really had to step up and be accountable for decisions because we were all responsible now for what we decided. Everyone was all-in at first, but when things don’t go the way you think they will, with people not really pulling their weight without someone looking over their shoulder, problems arise” (participant F4, April 29, 2014). Collectively for followers in the human capital management organization, intentions seemed good but the lack of feedback and perceived concern on the part of the organization led to a decline in nearly every key performance area. As an organization, this absent leadership scenario was the most destructive and demoralizing for the followers involved.

Followers in the local government organization experienced absent formal leadership for a period of 12 months. Study participants generally expressed concerns of lack of clarity with regard to where to seek direction, but also noted that their industry was often fraught with change, short deadlines, and other challenges similar to what was

taking place during the absent leadership period. The dominant patterns and themes that emerged from the five interviews in the local government organization alluded to the consideration that being tested in such ways was not new to the individuals or the organization. The followers “were doing great without a leader and since one [had] not been assigned, [they] seemed to be going back to where [they] were. It [was] hard to know where to go for answers sometimes” (participant F2, April 28, 2014). In spite of experiencing absent leadership for the longest duration of the four organizations, followers in the local government organization reported the least amount of overall disruption, attributable to the observation that such absences were perceived as relatively commonplace for the industry itself.

During the period of absent leadership for followers in the local government organization, “often more energy [was] spent, but it doesn’t yield greater or more efficient production” (participant F14, May 13, 2014). Morale amongst the followers presented no definitive change, either increased or decreased. One follower observed that “it’s a mix. You feel good meeting the urgent deadline, but then there’s the next one in the queue and it can appear as an unending queue without a leader to prioritize and guide the process” (participant F15, May 13, 2014). Morale also “really varies depending on what the key projects are. Sometimes you feel good about the work and other times you just feel overwhelmed, like the wheels are coming off” (participant F1, April 28, 2014).

“Triaging new tasks and activities doesn’t happen effectively” during absent leadership periods. “Often the process for how to handle a new tasking activity is through email discussion, which leads to confusion when [the organization] doesn’t enable the

whole team to discuss it in real time” (participant F1, April 28, 2014). The new tasks led to new responsibilities on the part of the followers, with roles being “revised over a period of weeks as personnel began fitting into new ones” (participant F2, April 28, 2014). These changes in roles and responsibilities subsequently led to “conflict mostly in group discussion and gaining consensus” although a feeling that the group was “more productive this way than when [it] had a leader” (participant F20, May 13, 2014) prevailed. Followers credited the organization’s ongoing experience with absent leadership scenarios to the improvement in productivity, with one participant noting that “absent leadership is unfortunately a consistent thing in our overall organization, so you learn to cope” (participant F15, May 13, 2014).

Decision making, like productivity, proved to be a function of the recurring absent leadership situations in the organization. There was often “some debate as to the merits of the decisions, but then they quickly sorted out and the decisions were followed,” with some followers observing “others taking more responsibility and making bigger decisions without needing approval” (participant F2, April 28, 2014). Such action leads to a sense of empowerment, which “comes from being able to take control sometimes and seeing what you are capable of doing” (participant F14, May 13, 2014).

Empowerment can instill a sense of leadership for followers, as recognized by one participant who reflected on seeing “empowerment embraced by some followers who were anticipated to decline after stepping into a leader role. It’s very refreshing and it causes reflection as to what factors were being incorrectly assessed in predictions for that individual” (participant F1, April 28, 2014). Summarily, followers in the local

government organization reflected that the familiar scenario of absent leadership enabled them to “stay calm under fire” (participant F2, April 28, 2014).

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes as Relate to the Research Questions for the Collective Follower Participant Sample

Among the 30 questions asked of the total 20 follower participants, selected interview questions were designed to focus on each research question. RQ1 (How do followers respond during periods of absent leadership?) was concerned with follower: 1) productivity; 2) morale; 3) direction; and 4) interpersonal behavior during periods of absent leadership. RQ2 (What actions do followers take to fill the void during periods of absent leadership?) sought to understand: 5) handling decisions; and 6) empowerment and motivation. RQ3 (What is the purpose of the actions and reactions of followers during periods of absent leadership?) sought to understand: 7) new responsibilities, roles, and changes by the individuals as a result of the leader’s absence; and provided insight on issues such as 8) the experience of the phenomena of absent leadership; 9) follower’s perceptions of the relationship between leaders and followers; 10) the positive or negative aspects of having no formal leader, if applicable; 11) followers’ perception of organizational response to their actions and reactions; and 12) the meaning of absent leadership as viewed by the follower participants as a result of the absent leadership experience.

RQ1. The objective of RQ1 (How do followers respond during periods of absent leadership?) was specifically to provide insight on the first four of these areas, focusing on levels of followers’ perception of productivity, morale, direction, and interpersonal

behavior as a result of the experience of absent leadership. As a collective overview of all followers from the four organizations, the lived experiences during periods of absent leadership revealed relatively no change in perception of productivity in most scenarios, with the exception of that in which organizational response to the situation was deemed unsatisfactory and unresponsive by its followers. As one follower noted, “I thought it was amazingly productive, considering the circumstances” (participant F5, April 29, 2014).

Only a small sampling of followers indicated a decrease in productivity, with many indicating that the absence of leadership alleviated the need for constant review and approval and that, instinctively, the followers simply did what needed to be done to complete tasks at hand. “Things went on pretty much as normal. It was more relaxed and [we] worked even harder” (participant F19, May 26, 2014). Feedback such as improved communication amongst the group members, completing tasks on time, and taking initiative on projects to meet deadlines were frequent responses. In some cases, followers sensed that more energy was being spent on reaching objectives but that the processes were viewed as more efficient and the results more rewarding. Overall, a feeling of improved productivity was felt amongst the followers during the period of absent leadership as a result of the removal of micro-management and a belief that “without a formal leader, [we] seemed to have more urgency and were not feeling like we had to do everything that one person dictated” (participant F8, June, 2014). It may be argued that the absence of formal leadership, in some situations, in turn led to a false sense of productivity due to the subsequent absence of chain of command, external evaluation, and what many followers referred to as micro-management.

Although a mix of opinions as to the effect on morale existed, the majority of participants also viewed it as being generally higher during the periods of absent leadership. Common themes in the perception of morale arose, such as the sentiment that “there was actually a boost in morale. Things weren’t as tense. We had more freedom to make decisions. We got more done” (participant F12, May 5, 2014). In one of the three absent leadership scenarios, an interim manager was assigned to the leader role although the position served more as a caretaker and administrator rather than one with formal leadership and decision making authority. Overwhelmingly, morale was deemed considerably higher at this time, with reported reasons including the looseness of the environment as being a significant factor. However, morale was deflated once a formal leader replacement was put into place. Factors contributing to an overall sense of improved morale included the positive reinforcement of completing tasks without a leader, the ability to meet deadlines in what was deemed a less tense and stressful environment, and a realization by some that they “could do well on [their] own if necessary” (participant F7, April 29, 2014). As with productivity, the perceived enhanced morale existed only in three of the organizations, with the fourth perhaps being an anomaly or, at the very least, very unique due to the lack of organizational response, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In line with the perception of generally improved morale levels overall, the capability to make decisions was likewise improved. Interestingly, many reported a lack of clarity and direction but nonetheless worked collectively to make consensus-based decisions. In doing so, however, participants reported that they experienced a “loss of

time and there was uncertainty about what to do” (participant F2, April 28, 2014). Others noted that “roles had to be revised over a period of weeks as personnel began fitting into new ones,” (participant F8, June 2, 2014), which resulted in confusion and a general lack of direction within the group. It may be argued that perhaps morale is highly correlated to feelings of empowerment, which was reported to be extremely high almost across the board in follower responses, and more a function of perceived independence rather than overall productivity.

Very few followers either reported lower levels of concern for direction or no visible change. A high number of participants expressed frustration without a formal leader in place, while some others felt that the lack of direction and confusion was not as present as expected. A great source of confusion and lack of direction stemmed from what some followers referred to as triaging, whereby new tasks and activities suffered due to extended periods of decision making and challenges in communication about how to proceed. Teaming and huddling around an issue served as a means to alleviate the perceived lack of direction and confusion in many cases, with decision by consensus serving as the primary standard practice instituted to overcome lack of direction within the group during the periods of absent leadership.

A considerable majority of followers reported a lower level of negative interpersonal behavior (how peers interacted with one another) during the period of absent leadership, resulting in fewer overall conflicts, while very few reported higher levels or no perceived change in interpersonal behavior levels. Any conflicts that did arise came predominantly from initial group discussion and the lack of a formal presence

to lead the effort. As pointed out by some followers, “there were slightly more conflicts amongst managers [during this period]” (participant F18, May 12, 2014) and “there was conflict mostly in group discussion and gaining consensus, but we were more productive this way than when we had [a leader] here” (participant F15, May 13, 2014). This positive conflict (Checketts, D., 2007) may very well have served as a driving force that prompted a perception of more overall productivity due to the need and inspiration to work more tightly as a group unit, thus creating greater group cohesion and efficiency.

RQ2. The objective of RQ2 (What actions do followers take to fill the void during periods of absent leadership?) was to specifically provide insight on perceptions regarding how followers handled making decisions that normally required a leader; if and how followers felt empowered; and if they felt motivated to take a leadership position as a result of the experience of absent leadership. Additional focus was put on the assumption of new responsibilities, acquisition of new skill sets, and adjustments needed by followers as well. Coupled with followers’ internal intellectualizing, their behaviors, actions, and reactions comprised the key means through which they worked to fill the void during periods of absent leadership, as will be discussed below.

A modest level of disruption to processes occurred in some cases due to what was generally reported as absent leadership resulting in a lack of good insight from an experienced, formal leader. Even in the case of interim leadership, the suddenness of the absent leadership situation proved to challenge followers in a variety of ways. “The absence of leadership led to a structural breakdown and lack of meaning or worth within the organization” (participant F1, April 28, 2014). “Certain projects and reports were

unable to be concluded without proper authorization” (participant F17, May 26, 2014), and “it was really hard knowing who was in charge or who wanted to be in charge” (participant F4, April 28, 2014). However, resolution allowed what was considered a reasonably positive process in decision making due to group communication and consensus in problem solving. Real-time decision making absent of the need to follow a formal chain of command was perceived as a reason for enhanced decision making within the group unit.

Decision making was a process almost wholly approached via group discussion and consensus, with most followers indicating this as the preferred means of action. Very few participants indicated individual or personal decision making as a preference or chose to defer to a group member demonstrating more experience in the situation at hand. Some isolated cases indicated hope that someone else would simply step up and make the decision or that the preferred action was to merely defer to the most senior member on the group. Via group consensus, followers observed an ability to “make decisions quicker with agreement and alignment,” (participant F3, April 28, 2014) as noted by one follower, with another supporting the sentiment by indicating that “some debate as to the merits of the decisions would occur, but then they quickly sorted out and the decisions got followed” (participant F1, April 28, 2014). Debate as to the merits of decisions was viewed as healthy and meaningful, as action plans were eventually put into place.

In only rare cases did individual followers pose their own challenges to the work unit, those being followers who either did not want to take on additional responsibilities or be part of the decision making process. One follower noted that “there was

redistribution of the [former] section supervisor's tasks. [I] was not personally happy about it, as [I] was already fully subscribed to another task and didn't want to add more things to [my] plate" (participant F4, April 28, 2014). In regard to such isolated cases, one follower suggested that "some followers are very content in [their] role and do not seek to experience the leader role. Recognizing this is key and reassuring them that they are valuable to the organization is critical to maintaining their trust and engendering their sense of self-worth and contribution" (participant F12, May 5, 2014). In that vein, conflict was minimized to an extent that no group in-fighting or significant confrontations were reported during the periods of absent leadership.

The majority of followers reported that the ability and need to make decisions without approval from a formal leader invited a new sense of empowerment as a result of the absent leadership scenario. Empowerment was perceived as substantially increased, primarily as a function of the lack of micro-managing leaders and the ability, or need, to make decisions within the group environment. Followers felt compelled to work independently which allowed for the vital sense of empowerment. As one follower noted, "I think empowerment comes from being able to take control sometimes and seeing what you are capable of doing" (participant F19, May 26, 2014).

This feeling as a product of control and subsequently uncovering individual and group capabilities also drove an increase in pride of work product and effort. "We find our best new ideas from those that haven't had the opportunity or inclination to share those ideas [previously]" (participant F3, April 28, 2014). Followers also reported a sense of self-worth and the ability to assume greater ownership of actions taken as a result of

the new feeling of empowerment. A small number of followers associated empowerment with more power, while others reflected that not every individual embraced empowerment or opportunities to step into leadership roles.

In addition to insight into decision making and empowerment, RQ2 provided opportunity to explore new responsibilities, skill sets, and adjustments on the part of followers during the period of absent leadership. Followers reported a significant need and desire to elevate contributions and to assume greater accountability for decisions and actions. “Making day-to-day decisions and knowing what issues to forward [to management] was key” in many of the follower’s activities, noting that “overall [the] staff rose to the challenge” (participant F6, April 29, 2014). The need for improved levels of communication was a common theme, with followers indicating that “a big thing was ensuring an increasing amount of communication and showing more visual effort in the company” (participant F10, May 5, 2014). A sense of appreciation for individual and group responsibility of tasks and actions compelled followers to assume new responsibilities and skills as an effort to fill the leadership void.

Some followers also observed the importance of respecting that not every group member had a desire to ascend to a leadership role and that understanding that individual desire was critical to maintaining respect, trust, self-worth, and contribution to group success. Followers indicated a need to adjust work habits and styles in an effort to overcome challenges and to contribute as peer mentors and coaches in such scenarios. Appendix F lists selected follower input regarding new responsibilities, skill sets, and necessary adjustments experienced during the period of absent leadership.

RQ3. The objective of RQ3 (What is the purpose of the actions and reactions of followers during periods of absent leadership?) was to gain insight into the followers' experience during periods of absent leadership as well as the various perceptions and responses associated with those lived experiences. Specifically, questions in this area focused on gaining a better understanding of the followers' experience of the absent leadership phenomena itself; the impact on the organization and the subsequent organizational response; follower's perceptions of the relationship between leaders and followers; the positive or negative aspects of having no formal leader; and the meaning of absent leadership as viewed by the followers as a result of the absent leadership experience.

Followers' lived experiences of the phenomena of absent leadership revealed a variety of perceptions and beliefs. Many followers indicated a sense of group and organizational improvement during the leader absence, eliciting feelings of enhanced camaraderie and cohesion as prompted by a perceived need to solidify the group unit due to "no direction as to where to seek guidance" (participant F15, May 13, 2014). Much of what many followers construed as enhanced processes during periods of absent leadership, as observed previously, may be attributed to new found freedom from the watchful eye of formal leadership and a presumed false sense of productivity and contribution.

This perceived sense of accomplishment led some followers to feel as though "once it was recognized that [we] didn't really need [the leader] to watch everything we were doing the organization was concerned that we might eventually become chaotic and

get too loose” (participant F20, May 13, 2014) without formal leadership direction. This observation, seemingly contradictory to expected organizational thought processes, further prompts the argument that the absent leadership scenario itself led to unrealistic perceptions on the part of some followers as a function of newly experienced unharnessed allowances in activity.

Interestingly, the overall perception of the organizations’ actions or reactions to the periods of absent leadership was less than desired by followers. One follower suggested that “there should be a hierarchy of management in place so that it can step up and take responsibility [because] there was no definition among managers as to who would take leadership” (participant F3, April 28, 2014) in the case of future leadership absences. Several followers reflected on the experience in a way that led them to believe that formal leadership may not be needed if the organization was equipped with capable employees. “Followers sometimes don’t need formal hand holding, over-the-shoulder micro-management. They just need to be respected and given the chance to do the jobs they were hired to do” (participant F18, May 26, 2014). Overall, followers expressed positive experiences with regard to their opportunities for growth and group development, but that the experience itself presented challenges and obstacles that were oftentimes slow or difficult to overcome. As noted by one follower, “leadership is the bond that makes a successful business, whether big or small” (participant F17, May 26, 2014). This contradiction with regard to followers’ perceived successes and improved processes in light of the predominant recognition of a need, in many cases, for formal leadership will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

A recurring theme for followers was concern for the potential of a leader's need for control, or power surge, reinstated upon the vacant leadership position being filled. "When a leader returns from an absence or a new one is put in his or her place, expect a sudden need for control to come back into play. Some leaders see control and power as being one and the same" (participant F10, May 5, 2014). The anticipation alone of this sudden power surge resulted in the general diminishing of the upward individual and group functions, feelings toward capabilities, and overall perceived value of what had taken place during the period of absent leadership. "Some sort of leader needs to be involved but not one who is bossy and controlling," expressed one follower with regard to an eventual formal leader replacement, adding that "the leader should help the group succeed and teach them what they don't know and the followers should be able to learn from the leader and replace them effectively when needed" (participant F5, April 29, 2014). An overarching sentiment from followers was one of the need for some form of leadership but one that was grounded in mutual trust and respect, whereby the key function of the leader would be to help the group succeed and to serve as mentor and coach. "Followers want to trust their leaders, but that trust has to be earned continually. Should it be lost, it takes an incredibly long time to reestablish" (participant F6, April 29, 2014). Appendix G offers a listing of select followers' comments regarding the lived experience of absent leadership.

Consideration of followers' perception of the impact of absent leadership on the part of the organization led to inquiry into if and how the organization responded to the absence. In terms of a collective summary of followers across the four organizations, a

general sense of disappointment in organizational leaders to recognize the effects on group functioning was a recurring, and unexpected, theme. In fact, when asked specifically if the organizations had attempted any changes in response to the periods of absent leadership, participants overwhelmingly reported little or no action had been taken. Perhaps more importantly, followers were left believing that “it was poorly handled. [We] had little direction as to what happened during the period of absent leadership and then when [we] tried to act in logical, professional ways, [we] were eventually squashed” (participant F4, April 28, 2014).

Most followers reported concerns about the organization’s response in general, suggesting that the companies had not responded well or even acknowledged concerns or issues relating to the scenario of absent leadership. In spite of the many indications that followers presented concerns and suggestions to their organizational leadership groups, the primary takeaway was that a lack of feedback, commentary, communication, and follow through existed on the part of the organizations. “[We] tried to implement new chains of decision making and check points for project management,” (participant F3, April 28, 2014) but when limited or no response was returned, the resulting impressions on the followers included thoughts of apathy, diminished confidence in the organization, lack of direction, and overall poor handling and acknowledgement of the issues brought forth by the followers. In all, the general lack of organizational interest perceived by followers led to lack of confidence in the organization, concerns of stability, and a growing number of followers seeking new employment opportunities. Appendices H through K list select followers’ perceptions of the impact of the absent leadership

scenarios on the organizations, and Appendix L lists select followers' comments regarding the organizational response to the leader absence scenarios.

Followers' perceptions of the fundamental relationship between leaders and followers were drawn out of additional inquiry pertinent to RQ3. Observed mostly was the recurring theme of trust and respect as a mutual consideration for leaders and followers. Some followers thought of leaders as being inherently more motivated and energized than their follower counterparts, while followers were deemed less confident and disorganized. Likewise, one follower indicated that "the leader is more in tune with their expectations while the follower is undecided about the next step" (participant F14, May 13, 2014). Echoing this sentiment, another follower indicated that "leaders bring positive results and moving forward but followers are still followers" (participant F10, May 5, 2014), suggesting a secondary role for followers overall in the leader-follower relationship dynamic. Some followers noted that the leader had the ability to create and drive accountability but that the followers were not capable of making key decisions.

From a balanced positive perspective, some participants contended that "the expected relationship should be that leaders and followers will partner together to ensure success with the leader's know-how and vision, keeping an eye on the progress and next steps" (participant F4, April 28, 2014). Some followers suggested that leaders and followers were "not all that different" and that "everyone is both a leader and a follower" (participant F3, April 28, 2014). Context and perspective of the scenario were deemed as key factors with regard to this opportunity. Followers indicated that "the leader was

needed to provide guidance as well as holding followers to a high standard of performance” (participant F14, May 13, 2014).

Followers, regardless of their independence in the workplace, were often viewed as “benefiting from a [previous formal] leader’s activities” (participant F20, May 13, 2014), suggesting that the prior leadership could lead to a situation in which followers were prepared to assume leadership roles and responsibilities if faced with the scenario of absent leadership. The most common cause for concern in the relationship, according to followers, was a stifling, non-creative environment created as a result of micro-management. Leaders were viewed as the part of the equation responsible for “providing direction but [then] getting out of the way so followers who do the real work can actually do it” (participant F5, April 29, 2014). Some participants suggested that “followers create good leaders, not vice versa” (participant F3, April 28, 2014), and that followers were “actually leaders in disguise” (participant F5, April 29, 2014). Appendix M lists select followers’ comments regarding their perception of the relationship between leaders and followers.

A function of the perceived leader-follower relationship coupled with the overall lived experience of leadership absence provided the opportunity to gain insight on followers’ perception of the need for formal organizational leadership. Some followers indicated positive aspects of having no formal leader in the organizational structure during the period of absent leadership, noting that “employees took more ownership of projects and assumed roles of greater decision making without being micro-managed” (participant F10, May 5, 2014), “[we] experienced real time solutions and decisions, and

empowerment for management as a whole instead of a select individual” (participant F5, April 29, 2014), and “it’s always good to have opportunities for followers to step up and see what they can do when no one’s in charge” (participant F13, May 12, 2014).

A greater sense of urgency and the creation of opportunities for followers to step out of the leader’s shadow enabled environments of positive, highly functioning group work units. “It made for better communication as a team” (participant F7, April 29, 2014) and ownership and pride in work product were evident, as reported by the followers. In a separate question, followers were asked frankly if formal leadership was necessary and the overwhelming response was that it was not. As a point of curiosity, however, the question thus begs to be asked as to the potential of differing responses to the interview questions in scenarios where absent leadership does not already exist. Likewise, considerations for how the organization would proceed should the formal absent leadership position not be refilled provides additional opportunity for inspection. These inquiries be will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Appendix N lists select followers’ perception of having no formal leader in place.

Finally, followers were given opportunity to provide their individual insight as to the meaning of absent leadership. The challenge of initial confusion and lack of direction served as the key issues observed by followers during the absent leadership scenarios. Concerns of organizational stability and what-if scenarios proved to be significant issues for most followers, with comments such as “there was unease about the future of the company and a true lack of communication regarding that” (participant F16, May 26, 2014), and “it made you question your career path and the stability of the organization

became a concern” (participant F4, April 28, 2014). The absent leadership experience was deemed by some as eye-opening such that individuals, work units, and the organizations themselves were challenged to address issues for which, in some cases, plans had not been put into place. Collectively, however, followers viewed the experience as an opportunity for self-investigation and as a means to creatively approach tasks and obstacles with confidence and a sense of empowerment. Appendix O identifies select followers’ comments and takeaways with regard to the perceived meaning of absent leadership as a result of the lived experience.

Evidence of Quality

Each participant follower was administered the same 30 question interview and transcripts were completed and maintained by me as the interviewer/researcher. The process of member checking was used; after transcription of the interviews, participants were afforded an opportunity to confirm accuracy of the data collected in the interview process. A sample approved transcript, not necessarily representing dominant or recurring themes, is presented as Appendix P.

A journal of memos and observations was logged and maintained in the NVivo software as a means to preserve chronological notes, address bracketing issues, personally reflect on the interview process, and better monitor the overall data capture and analysis process. Inserting personal reflection and observation in addition to key notes on recurring themes provided a means to formulate expected outcomes and hypothesize reasons for varying follower responses and feelings expressed. This

Research Memo Journal is presented in Appendix Q. A sample entry follows, as illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2

Sample Research Memo Journal Entries

Type	Name	Memo Notes
Memo	Themes	4/28/2014 8:18 PM Seeing early recurring themes of trust and respect as a necessary function of the leader-follower dynamic; surprising comments suggesting organization's lack of concern or apparent interest in recognizing how the absent leadership scenario is affecting the followers (Researcher reflection – have felt the trust/respect issue in similar scenarios as well; natural to expect trust and respect when you feel you are giving same; interesting how different the industries are with LG being so accustomed to lack of clarity and leader turnover while HCM followers are not responding well; LG followers seem to be dealing with the absent leader scenario better, perhaps as a function of being accustomed to the situation;)
Memo	Themes	5/17/2014 4:18 AM Not sure who is in charge at times a recurring theme; once again, no organizational response to the situation for yet another group of followers; demoralizing at times; lack of clarity although that is not unusual for LG companies; (Researcher reflection – HCM followers seem to be reeling with the absent leadership scenario and the apparent lack of concern by their organization, yet they still sense productivity in the group; is it a false sense of accomplishment since measurements and accountability are diminishing?; empowerment up almost across the board, again is this a new sense of “freedom” from the watchful eye?)

Outcomes

Research into the role of followership during periods of absent leadership resulted in a number of observed outcomes. Presented in a logical and systematic summary and interpreted in relation to their importance to the research questions (RQ1: How do followers respond during periods of absent leadership?; RQ2: What actions do followers

take to fill the void during periods of absent leadership?; and RQ3: What is the purpose of the actions and reactions of followers during periods of absent leadership?) those outcomes are as follows:

RQ1. From a collective perspective across the four organizations involved, followers from three of the four organizations responded fairly well via their individual and group experiences during periods of absent leadership, with one demonstrating considerable frustration and even a sense of desperation. Productivity levels were generally perceived to be improved somewhat in spite of the absent leadership, with one organization exhibiting a considerable decrease in this area. Morale levels were reported to be considerably higher, perhaps as a function of the absence of a formal chain of command and the inherent sense of freedom with which it brings, with fewer followers reporting lower levels of morale or no visible change. Again, this observation is with exception of the one organization that experienced significant challenges throughout the entire absent leadership period. About half of the followers indicated a diminished grasp on direction and more confusion, particularly with regard to where to go for answers and role adjustments, with the remainder reporting less confusion or no visible change. Interpersonal behavior issues were viewed as diminished considerably with very few followers reporting more conflicts and the remainder indicating fewer issues or no visible change. In the few cases of interpersonal behavior concerns, some followers took issue with their peers and group members using the absent leadership situation as an opportunity to reduce individual effort, seemingly with the hope that others would simply step up and fill any needs. These findings suggest that, overall, followers seized the

opportunities to step forward and address the absent leadership scenarios by improving communication and teamwork, and accepting new responsibilities and roles as necessary.

RQ2. Decision making via group discussion and consensus occurred the majority of the time for the followers experiencing absent leadership in these scenarios. On rare occasions, followers indicated they either were content to wait for others to step up and or elected to choose to defer to a more senior or more experienced group member for decisions. A very small number of followers approached decision making on their own, without involvement from the group unit. More than half of the followers felt more empowered during the absent leadership conditions, even in scenarios in which they questioned organizational communication and response to the absent leadership scenario, with the remainder indicating no sense of increased empowerment or no indication of a change in the level of empowerment. What seemed a direct correlation to this sense of empowerment was an astounding number of followers feeling more motivated in the absent leadership scenario, perhaps a result of perceived accomplishments due to reduced monitoring and measuring of individual and group activities. Only a very small number of followers felt less motivated or indicated no visible change. Ownership of responsibilities, pride in work product, and improved group communications were reported as key reasons for many followers to experience self-satisfaction during periods of absent leadership, indicated by expressions of a need-to-survive mentality.

RQ3. With regard to actions and reactions on the part of followers during periods of absent leadership, adjustment periods were necessary and new responsibilities, roles, and skill sets were required and instituted in many cases. Some followers took the

initiative to attempt to establish new processes and to assume the “do whatever is necessary to get the job done” mentality (participant F5, April 29, 2014) to overcome the absent leadership situation. Many followers were able to perform functions as if no absence existed, while a few (according to their peers) allowed themselves to be lulled into a more relaxed and perhaps less productive state. Teamwork and collaboration were viewed overall as key points of improvement during the absence periods, with little to no dissent or internal conflict reported with the exception of the interpersonal behavior issues noted previously. Surprisingly, no emergent leaders came forth in the course of the investigation. This may be a function of the overwhelming movement for group consensus and collective decision making on the part of the followers during the period of absent leadership, or it may be that no followers felt the need or a sense of qualification to step forward in an informal leadership role. Reasons for the lack of leader emergence, either formal or informal, are not known based on the followers’ feedback. However, some followers observed peers demonstrating actions which gave cause to suggest that those leaders were hidden and capable of stepping up. The perceived leader-follower relationship presented varying observations, with terms such as trust, respect, and partnering evolving as common themes. While many followers indicated that leaders are generally more highly motivated than their follower counterparts and that they can bring positive results to the collective effort, an overwhelming sentiment was that leaders and followers are not all that different in make-up but that a leadership presence benefits the group and organizational function. Followers also considered the meaning of absent leadership itself with regard to the lived experience of the phenomena. Of the many

insightful thoughts offered by the follower participants, one in particular seemed to grasp and assess the whole experience very succinctly:

Absent formal title leadership can be successful, as long as each individual in a particular group has a great understanding with the ultimate goal, can be trustworthy and accountable, can agree to make a final decision, move forward, and have a decent amount of communication skills. The downfall with absent leadership is that without having pull on direction and being able to make a decision and move forward to get a result, the team reaches a limit. (participant F3, April 28, 2014)

Of considerable concern, in light of this comment, was the observance of group representation to the larger organization, in which followers indicated repeatedly that lack of organizational communication and feedback was so significantly lacking during the periods of absent leadership. Finally, the exploration of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership also provided a connection between the lived experiences themselves and how those experiences affected followers' perceptions of whether or not formal leadership is necessary. The ability to lead may very well be a function of the scenario at hand rather than the formal designation of who makes decisions, directs processes, and benefits from title authority within an organization. As touched upon very briefly early in Chapter 1, the concept of leadership has become universal and society has conditioned us to accept its need, but as observed during the course of this investigation, consensual, self-managing, and autonomous teams may very well be a workable, even preferred, perspective. These will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Throughout history, the leader-follower relationship has served as a key factor not only in the success of the organizational but in that of the individuals who make up the relationship itself. The research of thought leaders such as Kellerman (2008b), Chaleff (2001), Kelley (1992), Northouse (2010), Bennis (2010b), Ricketts (2002), and Greenleaf (2002) has generally demonstrated that a positive exchange is both critical to organizational success and meaningful with regard to follower effectiveness and leadership development. The leadership literature, including that from Agho (2009), Covey (2008), and Merton (1969), also suggested that the role of leader in organizational success is an ever-present need and that a layer of supervision is essential to that success.

What had not been studied, however, are the consequences, actions, and perceptions that take place when that relationship no longer exists. Likening it to the chicken and the egg causality dilemma, eliciting the question of which comes first, is both common and justifiable: Do leaders succeed because of exemplary followers or are followers effective because of the guidance of their leaders? The purpose of this research was to propel the inquiry a step further than merely discussing the value of the leader-follower dynamic, but to ask how those in the role of followership acted and reacted during periods when no formal leadership was present. What was uncovered in the investigation exposed much more than merely data regarding the leader-follower dynamic; the interviews conducted provided insight into potential substitutes for the traditional leader-follower relationship such as self-managed teams, prompted re-considerations of the need for formal leadership itself, and raised significant concerns

regarding perceived organizational response and support of followers during various absent leadership scenarios challenging the conventional assumption that leaders are essential. In their seminal work, Kerr and Jermier (1978) posited that “certain individual, task, and organizational variables act as ‘substitutes for leadership,’ negating the hierarchical superior’s ability to exert either positive or negative influence over subordinate attitudes and effectiveness” (p. 375). In more contemporary study, Xu and Zhong (2013) expanded on the classic paradigm, and in doing so contended that “indifference toward organizational rewards [and feedback] was a negative predictor of satisfaction” for followers (p. 682).

The study was designed to inquire into the lived experiences of followers experiencing absent leadership in an organizational setting. The data collected via interviews provided patterns and themes from which a collective voice of the participants was used to interpret the phenomenon as it related to the research purpose statement: Regardless of whether a leader facilitates or inhibits the ability of followers to contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives, significant concerns come to bear for followers under conditions of absent leadership. The meaningfulness in this understanding lies in the recognition that when periods of absent leadership become extended, followers’ actions can drive and ultimately become responsible for the organization’s successes or failures. What had not been anticipated in the creation of this study design, or even considered as a possibility, was the potential that a perhaps even more critical element of the dynamic could have the greatest impact on the role of followership during periods of absent leadership, such as the role and actions of the

organization itself. The delay in assigning a new leader, the lack of direction offered during the interim period, the allowance of autonomy among followers to “carry on,” and even the very omission of organizational response and support during the periods of absent leadership proved to significantly impact followers’ perceptions and long-term actions.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of findings section includes conclusions that address each of the three research questions, contains references to outcomes presented in the Results section of Chapter 4, covers all the data, is bounded by the evidence collected, and relates to a larger body of literature on the topic including the conceptual and theoretical framework. The organizational environment itself was not the primary concern of this study, although it proved to play a significant role in the outcomes. Of principal focus was the behavior of followers during periods of absent leadership. Contrary to assumptions and expectations that one might have regarding the ways in which followers respond to periods of absent leadership, the research findings demonstrated that in spite of challenges and obstacles to continue effective organizational contributions during these periods, individual followers were nonetheless able to demonstrate stabilized or improved performance in several key areas. Only when the followers perceived that the organization itself had failed them did processes and individual as well as group contributions break down.

Areas such as productivity, morale, decision making, and interpersonal behavior showed positive or relatively unnoticeable levels of change amongst the preponderance

of followers. As a collective voice, follower participants viewed productivity within the unit to exhibit relatively no change most of the time. At times of perceived productivity declines, the followers typically indicated that improvement eventually occurred once the initial scenario of absent leadership was accepted and absorbed within the group, ultimately leading to increased productivity over the duration of the absence. This positive conflict (Checketts, 2007) might be perceived as a springboard for the perception of overall productivity improvements as a direct result of the need and inspiration to work more tightly as a unit, thus creating greater group cohesion and efficiency. As noted by one participant, “Less was completed [initially], but we came up with more ideas and it was less stressful” (participant F13, May 2, 2014). Morale within the group, however, surged with the recognition of the absence of micro-managing leaders and the freedom and flexibility to produce expected outcomes without constant monitoring of work practices. “There was actually a boost in morale,” one follower indicated, adding that “things weren’t as tense [and] we had more freedom to make decisions” (participant F12, May 5, 2014). Another follower noted, “Morale grew even more and we realized we could do well on our own if necessary” (participant F7, April 29, 2014).

Empowerment and decision making practices also increased collectively as a result of a new sense of pride and ownership in the work product and the ability to infuse more creativity into problem solving. Said one participant, “I think empowerment comes from being able to take control sometimes and see what you are capable of doing. I think we have a new sense of empowerment now” (participant F19, May 26, 2014). Another follower added that “absolutely there was empowerment and a new sense of pride”

(participant F4, April 28, 2014). As a result, motivation skyrocketed for followers, with nearly every participant indicating an increase in the area. “I think everyone just knew what had to be done and was motivated by that” (participant F18, May 26, 2014), observed one follower. Another participant noted that motivation was “very high. People were excited to pursue tasks and take ownership of projects” (participant F8, June 2, 2014).

Making decisions within the group structure was also observed as being an improved process during the leadership absence. “I think our team seemed to be able to make decisions quicker with agreement and alignment” (participant F3, April 28, 2014) was a sentiment echoed by several study participants. Interpersonal behavior also improved collectively, with fewer conflicts and improved camaraderie amongst group members. Quite simply, one follower contended that “conflicts were fewer” (participant F3, April 28, 2014). Subsequently, there was “not as much [confusion] as you might expect,” according to one follower, adding that the followers were “good at working together” (participant F19, May 26, 2014).

What does this mean, then, in reflection on the role of followers during periods of absent leadership? Had morale and interpersonal behavior escalated but productivity and decision making functionality decreased significantly, one might be inclined to simply reflect that followers merely took the absent leadership scenario as an opportunity to proceed in a business-as-usual mode and either wait for formal leadership replacement or for the organization to step in and define constraints on follower activity. The

improvements suggest, however, that followers did, in fact, not only succeed in many key areas of functioning but also exceeded in those areas as well.

In building on the work of Kerr and Jermier (1978), Manz and Sims (1980) noted that followers could assume the role of organizational leadership during periods of recognized leader absence, providing substitutes for leadership via self-managed teams. By managing their own behavior and setting their own personal and work unit performance standards in the absence of formal leadership, individual followers interviewed in this study were capable of asserting task-related knowledge as a means to address and overcome the understood task demands. Followers exhibited natural tendencies during periods of absent leadership to spontaneously develop these self-managing teams, suggesting a form of emergent leadership as a vehicle to fill the void. Followers' improvement in key performance areas also suggest that, although they may not have been fully prepared to assume the leadership role at the onset of the absent leadership period, some followers may have in fact been leading in a subtle way all along. Again, these observations are made absent of the one unique scenario which occurred amongst followers in the human capital management organization that resulted in diminished performance and increased conflict.

First, consider the three organizations in which slight disruptions occurred but where, overall, followers performed well during the absent leadership scenarios. The contention made previously that many followers may have been leading in a subtle way all along may very well speak to the concept of servant leadership, as proposed by Greenleaf (2002), which posits that, while fundamentally a style of leadership, servant

leadership is nonetheless often associated with, and compared to, followership. Greenleaf cited a parable of servant leadership (Hesse, 1956) in which, while on a mythical journey, the story's central figure, Leo, accompanies his party in the role of one who undertakes all the menial chores, spiritual uplifting through song, and various other traditionally servant-related responsibilities. However, when Leo disappears, the party is unable to continue and ultimately finds itself in disarray. The journey is thus abandoned as a result of the absence of its servant, Leo. Later, one of the party's members, after wandering for many years, finds Leo and is subsequently led to the Order that had sponsored the group's journey. It is then that he realizes Leo, one who was looked upon merely as the group's servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order itself. All along, leading from behind, Leo was in fact the group's guiding spirit and noble leader.

It can be concluded from the data that in some situations a servant leader, perhaps one who attempted to create and implement new processes during the period of absent leadership, was actually subtly leading the work unit all along. Not everyone is a servant leader, however, as data from the study revealed. There are those who are content to wait for others to lead or to step up and provide direction. These followers, as noted by study participants who demonstrated no desire to assume new roles or leadership functions, tended to remain stagnant and, in some cases, create a sense of frustration for their peers for the unwillingness to strive for higher aspirations. "Some seemed to want to [lead]," said one participant, "but not me. I really don't have aspirations for that" (participant F12, May 5, 2014).

Yet, it is not necessary for everyone to step up to lead; it is only necessary that enough people cooperate and that eventually all work toward achieving the objectives of the group prevails. Hacker's (2001, 2010) followership model discussed a number of unique follower types that presented themselves during this study's interview process. In the case of those uninterested in taking the lead, the author identified this particular inert form of follower demonstrating lower aspirations for leadership position as the *sheep follower*, or "individuals [who] are passive and depend on someone to tell them what to do, when to do it, and how often. If they have nobody providing them with such instructions they wander around waiting for direction to be given. They do not exhibit critical thought, nor do they show initiative" (p. 1). It was these followers who typically reported no change in group functionality during the leader absence, suggesting that increases or decreases in any area of activity would have remained unnoticed simply because their mode of operation was to simply wait for the next direction, and then to follow it. These followers are, as one might conclude, the ones who are clearly in need of formal leadership; nonetheless, they proved to be in the minority of this particular study on the role of followership during periods of absent leadership and did not negatively impact the processes and overall actions of the collective follower work units.

It is important to note, however, that these sheep followers, as well as others to be discussed, are nonetheless integral parts of the organization. After all, not everyone can lead and many attempts at filling the leadership void might ultimately create conflicts and rivalries. The fact that these followers seemed quite balanced in managing their individual aspirations may have contributed to the very success of these groups.

Buchanan (2007), who also discussed followership types, adapted Kelley's (1998) followership patterns, noting that these followers "will do what you tell them, but that's all—nothing more, nothing less" (p. 105). Their value lies in the ability to do what is asked of them; however, a great deal of supervision and direction is needed to guide sheep followers and they tend to take little or no ownership of any true organizational objectives or missions. Kelly's depiction of the five types of followers is illustrated in Figure 6:

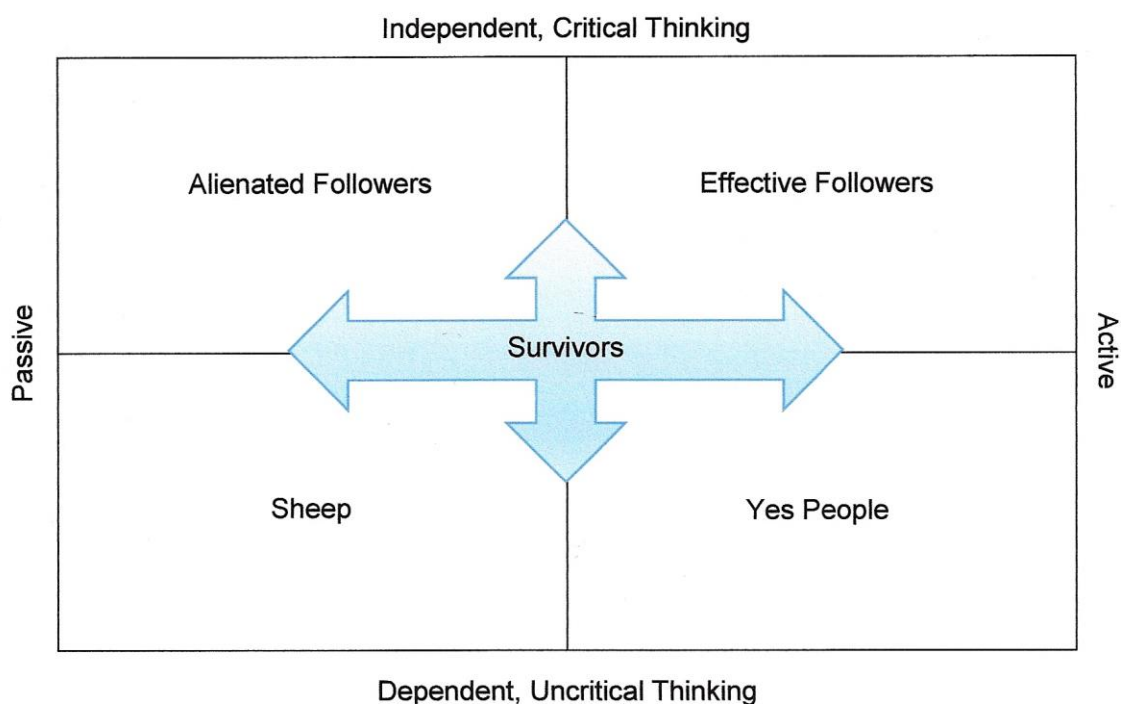


Figure 6. Robert Kelley's followership patterns. Followership patterns. Adapted from "In Praise of Followers," by R. Kelley, 1998. *Harvard Business Review*, 66, 142–148.

Hacker (2010) also referenced *yes-followers* by noting that, "similar to the sheep typology, these individuals are also dependent and non-critical in their thinking.

However, they are aggressively dependent on their leaders and enthusiastically seek out

direction. They do exactly what they are told and no more. They tell the leader what the leader wants to hear, not necessarily what the leader needs to know. No new ideas come from Yes-Followers – ever” (p. 1). A small contingency of these followers were exposed in the study as well but, again, were very much in the minority of the collective follower participants. As one follower indicated, there was “no direction as to where to seek guidance [as] others tried to assume leadership” (participant F15, May 13, 2014), suggesting a desire on the part of the follower to receive and precisely follow the direction of a formal leader. Buchanan (2007) referred to yes-followers as “the bobble-headed followers who constantly work to stay on the boss’s good side. They’ll let the boss run straight into rush-hour traffic and pat him on the back the entire way” (p. 105).

The study also identified several followers who presented solutions and leadership alternative ideas to management, only to find that the organizational response was either insufficient or non-existent. Hacker (2010) listed this group as *alienated followers*, or “individuals [who] are critical thinkers and very independent in their relations with management, but [who] will passively carry out their role in the organization. They are often cynical and skeptical. They may also tear down what the leader is trying to build up” (p. 2). These followers offered the most critical assessment of organizational response to the period of absent leadership, perception of the leader-follower relationship, and the overall need for formal leadership in the organization. One follower in the study contended that the group “began to wonder about the company’s direction and if [our] jobs were secure because it didn’t seem all that urgent or important to get the right person in place” (participant F4, April 28, 2014). This recurring theme of lack of response on the

part of the organization proved to be the most challenging and negative part of the experience for the followers studied. These followers, according to Buchanan (2007), “get a bad rap,” as they typically “care about the organization” and are really “just one click away from being effective followers” (p. 107).

Pragmatic followers, as defined by Hacker (2010), are “individuals [who] are capable workers who prefer political expediency to independence. They tend to be bureaucrats, who carry out policy to the letter of that policy. Their motto is “Better Safe Than Sorry” and they typically survive sweeping changes in the workplace” (p. 2). Study participants in this category generally expressed interest in business as usual in the absence of formal leadership direction, avoiding the introduction of new issues or problems outside of the standard operating procedures. One study participant said, “It wasn’t really noticeable and we all just kinda [sic] kept doing our thing” (participant F11, May 5, 2014).

Follower interviews also identified what Hacker (2010) refers to as *exemplary followers*, or those who “think for themselves. They don’t blindly follow, and may constructively disagree with the leader, respectfully pointing out options.” According to Hacker, they “have the organization’s best interests at heart. They do their job with great enthusiasm and energy. They pay attention to policy issues, implications, and implementation. They are self-starters, creative problem solvers, and apply their talents for the organization even if they are surrounded by non-productive colleagues or sheep. They add value to the organization” (p. 3). These “followers are actually leaders in disguise” (participant F5, April 29, 2014) who propelled the collective follower

participant pool to achieve positive results in many areas during the period of absent leadership, and to provide reason to believe that more exemplary followers exist that organizations might be easily led to assume or believe. It was the exemplary followers who presented the organizations with new ideas and solutions to overcome the absent leadership dilemma, regardless of the organization's response to those proposals.

In the case of the health care management scenario, in which nearly all key performance areas declined for followers and organizational response to the absent leadership situation was at its worst, a completely different view of the scenario must be considered. It seems implausible that an organization would allow itself to completely ignore and isolate followers not only experiencing absent leadership but seeking feedback and guidance during that period as well. Where each of the other three organizations experienced a perception of some productivity gains, significantly improved morale and a heightened sense of empowerment during the absent leadership scenario, even these key areas were diminished for the health care management organization's followers. With that addressed, it may be well advised for this situation to be considered an anomaly and an outlier in the data capture process, leading to consideration for separate future investigation into the relationship between followers and their organizations during periods not only of absent leadership but also of crisis management scenarios.

One might also consider an extension to the concept of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). LMX, as presented by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) and discussed earlier in the Operational Definitions section of Chapter 1 in this paper, focuses on reciprocal functions between the leader and the follower based on respect, trust, and mutual obligation,

contends that both the leader and the follower are essential to the organizational mission and therefore mutually responsible for the success of the relationship. Considering the organization itself as a source of direction and guidance during periods of absent leadership, one might very well expand the LMX concept to that of a proposed Organization-Member Exchange (OMX) construct. LMX loses a key relationship component during periods of absent leadership, and an OMX approach may assist in challenging any assumptions that the key to exchange theory lies in the leader and follower exclusively, without regard to the organization itself. That noted, a potential OMX approach thus proposes multi-dyadic relationships between the organization and each follower directly, whereby the same dimensions of “trust, respect, loyalty, liking, intimacy, support, openness, and honesty” (Graen & Scandura, 1987) are essential to the relationship and the ultimate success of the organization. Of course, this is suggested for further study. In the absence of formal leadership, other organizational influences will result in either encouraging positive successful ongoing performance in the spirit of constructive organizational citizenship (Kellerman, 2008b) or they will undermine the productivity of those in need of a coherent plan for the future. This, in turn, may result in negative organizational citizenship and/or a loss of productivity.

As evidenced in participant responses in this study, these OMX dimensions were collectively absent on the part of the organizations. This absence subsequently led to followers’ overwhelmingly high level of dissatisfaction resulting from the indifference to the absent leadership scenarios in the health care organization. As a whole, however, followers performed relatively well in spite of the lack of action or response from their

organizations. Subsequently, the “continuum ranging from low-quality, in which the relationship is based strictly on the transactional part of the employment contract, to high-quality relationships based on mutual liking, trust, obligation, and respect” (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008, p. 101) fell most notably in the range of low-quality. The performance of followers was acceptable and at times even admirable, even though the relationship between organization and followers was poor. In consideration, it was the organization as an entity that failed the followers during periods of absent leadership.

Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this research was to understand the role of followership during periods of absent leadership, and to better assess the ways in which followers act and react under those conditions. It was further intended to provide a better understanding of how such periods of absent leadership might impact and form the role of followership. In this process, much was learned about the dynamic of the leader-follower relationship itself, considerations of the organizational response to these scenarios, and how followers perceive the scenario as a positive or negative experience. The universal consideration that leadership is necessary from a societal perspective has been partially responsible for the lack of deeper study into the role of the follower in spite of recognition of the need for both parts of the leader-follower equation. To reiterate a point drawn out previously in this investigation, it is considered natural to look to a leader even in the case of self-managing and autonomous teams; in fact, society as a whole has conditioned individuals to do so. We are taught that we “need leaders who care and have the courage to eradicate poor practices” in organizational settings (Owen, 2013, p. 30). Based on the analysis of

data captured in this study, the concepts of consensual self-managing teams and autonomous work groups as preferred organizational perspectives might be worthy of consideration.

During the periods of absent leadership, productivity either struggled, leveled out, or realized only marginal gains; morale amongst the leaderless followers was boosted as a function of the perceived freedom resulting from an absence of micro-managing leaders; a sense of empowerment was experienced across the board for followers; decision making processes appeared to simplify and streamline; and interpersonal behavior within the group construct was marked by fewer and less destructive conflicts. Followers took it upon themselves to bridge the gap during periods of absent leadership and, in light of their perceived improvements and successes, subsequently questioned the fundamental necessity of formal leadership as a function in the group's make-up.

Informal leadership appeared to emerge in many cases, while some followers simply resolved to do nothing and move forward with a business-as-usual mentality. The most surprising and unexpected result of the study was that organizations failed to seize the opportunity for stability, guidance, and follower advancement during the period of absent leadership as the collective organizational responses and feedback were relatively non-existent and deemed completely unsatisfactory in the opinions of the followers. Further investigation into OMX considerations would therefore be a fruitful area of future research studies, as will be discussed later in this discussion.

Two approaches to the analysis of the behavior of followers under conditions of absent leadership were considered earlier in this text (Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, &

Morris, 2006; Nolan & Harty, 2001; Lundin & Lancaster, 1990); those being: 1) That absent or failed leadership may inspire and stimulate either the emergence of informal leadership or chaos among followers; and 2) That followership may or may not simply be a passive and leadership-dependent component of the organization and, subsequently, may not necessarily require immediate efforts or some other serious interventions to fill the void in leadership. The study illustrated that absent leadership did in fact inspire and stimulate the emergence of informal leadership via improved self-managed processes, communication, and task-related results, regardless of the response from and acknowledgement of the organizations themselves. It also revealed reason to conclude that the leader-follower relationship is not merely passive or leadership-dependent and that efforts to fill a void left by absent leadership may not be as urgent and necessary as expected. The results of this study suggest that formal leadership itself may not even be necessary in some situations. Successful leader-follower dynamics hinge on an effective match among personalities and appropriate use of interpersonal skills; potential dysfunctional relationships result from a mismatch. In the face of absent leadership, however, perhaps certain follower behaviors, personalities, and values might very well be the keys to successful transitions or at least just tolerated without a need to be controlled or for the individuals to conform. This study further revealed that the absence of organizational communication, response to followers' needs for support, and direction plays a significant role in the advancement of individual and group activities as well as that of the organization itself.

Thus, implications for social change exist. First, the individual who falls into the group which Hacker (2010) referred to as exemplary followers must be both encouraged and charged to further exemplify this elevated form of followership and should subsequently assume the informal leadership responsibility of driving all other followers to share in the enthusiasm and energy representative of one who attends expertly to policy issues, implications, and implementation or organizational processes and objectives. It is the organization's responsibility to recognize and groom followers for this level of functionality and to provide avenues to enhance creative problem solving capabilities, allowing for opportunities to apply their talents in ways that add value to the organization while simultaneously engendering the collective contributions from all followers.

In light of the massive amounts of money spent on leadership development institutionally, universities and other entities of higher learning must be held accountable for recognition of the significance of capable followership as well, and to promote an understanding that leadership is a practiced and exercised attribute rather than one that is assumed merely via the title one holds. Such an effort might assist in the better understanding of the leader-follower dynamic, promote a more just form of organizing workplace settings such that the need for a superior or formal leader is lessened, and lead to a lessening of the gap in understanding the value of the follower's role in the organization. The leveraging of individual followers' strengths in a way that leads to enhanced group performance might very well prove to be that key characteristic for leadership. Preparation and follower development, with a focus on continuity in the face

of absent leadership, may in fact be the key to organizational success when leadership voids arise. It can argued that, utilizing a group' multiple assets, a shared leadership can become a more generalized practice where the burden does not always fall on the one person.

Perhaps most importantly, organizations should realize that given the latent leaders among their workforce, attempts at developing self-managed groups that would fully utilize the leadership potential might serve to negate negative effects of the departure of a designated leader and promote employee wellbeing as contributing and valued members of the organization.

Recommendations

Inspection into the role of followership during periods of absent leadership resulted in findings both expected and unexpected. In light of these results, it is evident that additional meaningful action and further study into this phenomena are needed.

Actions

In addition to the organizational and institutional recommendations previously offered, an argument for an elevated level of education in crisis management and followership development, as well as emergent leadership in the higher learning arena, is in order. Management, Communications, Organizational Change, and similar subjects are lacking in the key organizational component of followership development. When asking a college student whether he or she prefers to lead or follow, social convention and existing literature alone will likely drive selection of the former. However, whether formal leadership, interim leadership, or no evidence of leadership exists in an

organization, the argument stands that in these scenarios it is the follower who must continue to perform and, to do so, must be well educated, prepared, and supported.

Likewise, organizations cannot expect to sustain themselves when scenarios of absent leadership are neither supported by an action plan nor expertly designed and articulated follower response provisions. They certainly cannot expect to sustain themselves if they are content to ignore and generally refuse to acknowledge and support followers' sense of crises and need for direction in these scenarios either. Organization-wide education in the areas of leadership emergence, self-managing and autonomous teams as substitutes for formal leadership, management of positive conflict in the workplace, and this researcher's self-positing OMX relationship hypothesis would do well to inform, educate, and prepare followers for periods of absent leadership and to rise to new levels of contribution to the organization. At the very least, organizations should consider the effects that absent leadership can have on followers, even knowledge workers who work fairly unsupervised (Xu and Zhong, 2013), who are neither fully prepared, educated, nor supported in how to act in meaningful and effective ways to fill the void during these periods,.

Further Study

In reflection of this research process, note must be made of the difficulty experienced in the process of garnering organizational participation in the study. Organizations' admittance to, and acceptance of, absent leadership scenarios was not easily obtained. Discussing, and admittance to, the potentially negative scenarios of absent leadership proved to an unpopular topic. Assuring anonymity as well as the right

to withdraw from the study if desired eventually provided the means to gaining participation of community partners. As such, further study in this area would be best tempered with the expectation of roadblocks and unwillingness on the part of organizations to expose and discuss the phenomena of the role of followers during periods of absent leadership.

Nonetheless, this research produced several indications that additional study into the phenomena of followership during periods of absent leadership is needed. First and foremost, the data collected in this research revealed dissimilarities in organizational functionality and processes, primarily in the area of response and action to leadership crises on the part of the organization itself. Note should be made of the limitations of this study: First, the samples in this study were limited to only five followers in each of four organizations; Second, the generalization of findings might thus be limited to these organizations; and third, these two points collectively bring recognition to consideration that this study scratched the surface of an area that is underpublicized and under-articulated in organizational settings. In fact, in consideration of the rare attention to this topic of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership, this inspection of the phenomena could provide stimulus for further exploration and more related empirical research. A future study, expanded considerably with regard to number of follower participants on a broader scale, is likely to provide more robust and meaningful data. The study itself may also benefit from a focus on specific industries as a means to determine if the results found here are consistent within various organizational spaces. Also, researching the phenomenon in more industries and more varied types of professions or

job categories is needed. One might expect to find a difference, for example, in blue collar environments, but further, expanded research is needed to determine this.

Additionally, engagement of a longer term research project that allows for three levels of investigation would likely present an entirely unique, deeper set of data. Those levels would include: 1) investigation into the *perceived* role of followership during periods of absent leadership for organizations not experiencing the phenomena; 2) investigation into the *true lived experiences* in the role of followership during periods of absent leadership in the course of the unfolding phenomena; and 3) investigation into the role of followership during periods of absent leadership within organizations *after* the phenomena has occurred and some form or organizationally approved leadership has been reinstated. Such a study prompts opportunity to more closely observe and evaluate the role of followership during periods of absent leadership before, during, and after the phenomena has occurred, thus providing scholars and organizations with a means to better comprehend, prepare for, and ultimately minimize or perhaps even avoid such scenarios. More importantly, it might provoke attention to the preparation of particularly positive followership behaviors that would subsequently lead to constructive organizational citizenship behaviors in times of need such as during periods of absent leadership.

Finally, implementation of consensual self-managing and autonomous teams in the organizational workplace, in addition to traditional formal leader guided work units, might provide for more insight into the value, effectiveness, and degree of organizational success derived from various leader-follower relationships. Investigation into OMX such

that a better understanding of how and why organizations act or fail to act in relationship to their followers during periods of absent formal leadership also presents opportunity for future studies. As noted by Ed Taft, former VP HR of Lockheed Martin, “We cannot lose sight of the fact that employee satisfaction, how you treat and deal with people, is the biggest lever in retaining and motivating a workforce. This means having the right environment and the right leadership in place” (Mourino-Ruiz, 2010, p. 39).

Reflection

Prior to this investigation, I felt absolutely committed to achieving a better understanding of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership. Based on research and readings of many of the most recognized and prolific thought leaders on the subjects of leadership, followership, workplace management, and the like, I was prepared to immerse myself fully in this investigation. My expectations included findings that followers are truly undervalued and that they have the propensity and ability to lead, as professed by such noted intellectuals as Chaleff (1995, 2001), Kellerman (2004, 2008), and Kelley (1992, 1997, 1998), among others. These thought leaders have paved the way for more current discussions (Imoukhuede, 2011; Goldman, 2011; Ruiz et al, 2011; Izzo, 2012; Kirchhubel, 2010; among others) that both support the need for greater understanding of followers’ roles and recognition that formal leaders are not necessarily the key ingredient for organizational success as well. I expected to uncover clear evidence that formal leadership is, in fact, not critical to organizational success. I did not, however, allow these expectations to infect or bias the data collection process.

What I learned is that different organizational environments, different leader-follower dynamics, and different industry scenarios play significant roles in the actual ways in which followers act to fill the void of absent leadership. What I also learned is that, as mentioned previously, this study merely serves as a starting point, a springboard, for what can be learned via further, more extensive, and more exhaustive investigation. It is my hope that interest and value in this opportunity for greater investigation and pursuit of a greater understanding of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership might therefore surface.

Concluding Statement

How an organization permits, encourages, or deters followers from achieving goals during periods of absent leadership is directly related to the function of preparation for the absence itself. It may even be more critical than the mere execution of effective leader-follower dynamics. Followers' actions can drive and ultimately become responsible for the organization's successes or failures, but when those followers are not fully prepared for the absent leadership scenario or, worse, when the organization creates its own obstructions to successful action in the face of the phenomena, it is unlikely that either exceptional follower performance or desired organizational outcomes will result.

This gap in knowledge about absent leadership and the consequences of this absence has only slightly been closed via this investigation. In fact, it may be argued that, based on the findings and recommendations for further study, more windows of opportunity for investigation and understanding of the phenomena exist now than prior to conducting the study. Extended study can offer additional insight into how followers

might provide the needed leadership in varying ways to subsequently impact the organization in a positive manner. Clearly an argument exists to expand on this business problem in a way that supports the need for further study.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide – Follower Participants

In accordance with Patton's (2002) format for the standardized open-ended interview design, questions will be sequenced in the following order for each interview. Initial questions (Set One: Profile), administered via written questions, are intended to elicit fundamental follower profile information and to serve as a prelude to the more specific questions that follow. In pursuit of a better understanding of the role of followership during periods of absent leadership, the interview will be aligned to elicit answers to two fundamental questions: 1) What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and 2) What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon?

Approximately 20 questions will follow, listed as Set Two: Absent Leadership, and Set Three: The Behavior of Followers and the Organization, each administered via verbal interview formats. These questions will be administered individually to the follower participants. A general interview process may be interjected per each interview session based on appropriate timing and need as determined by the interviewer.

Set One: Profile (directed to individuals, via written questionnaire prior to Set

Two: Core questions).

Q.1. What is your role in the organization?

Q.2. How long have you been in this role in this organization?

Q.3. What are your responsibilities?

Q.4. What are your strengths and weaknesses in this role?

Q.5. What are the greatest challenges in this role?

Q.6. What is your title?

Q.7. How long have you been employed by the organization?

Set Two: Absent Leadership (via individual in-person, phone, or Skype interview).

Q.8. How long was the period of absent leadership present in the organization?

Q.9. If there was a substitute for leadership during that period, how was it exercised?

Q.10. What was the impact of the absence of leadership on you and the organization?

Q.11. How did the group as a whole respond to the absence of leadership? **Note: should the participants require more prodding, the following extended questions may be included:*

- a. Was it more or less productive?
- b. Was morale higher or lower?
- c. Was there any lack of direction about what to do?
- d. Were there more or fewer interpersonal behavior issues (how peers got along together)?
- e. How did the followers handle decisions that normally required a leader?

Q.12. How has the work unit functioned during this absence of leadership?

Q.13. Are there positive aspects about not having a leader at the moment?

Q.14. Are/were any followers motivated to become a leader of the group? Why or why not? Will the replacement come from within the group or be a new person?

Q.15. Is leadership needed now? Explain.

Q.16. Has the work unit improved or declined in cohesion and productivity during this absence of leadership?

Set Three: The Behavior of Followers and the Organization – The way people think about leaders and followers is very important in any organization (continued in-person, verbal individual questions).

Q.17. Based on your experience, what need was there for leadership and how are the leaders' and followers' roles different?

Q.18. What can you say about the expected relationship between the followers and the leader?

Q.19. What new responsibilities or tasks have been expected of the various followers or of the group if any during this period of absent leadership? What were the responses to those expectations?

Q.20. Have you felt or seen a new sense of empowerment as a result? Why or why not?

Q.21. Describe the perceived motivation of the followers during the period of absent leadership.

Q.22. What successes or challenges did the followers experience during this time?

Q.23. What new skill sets were acquired during this time, if any?

Q.24. How have the followers' actions and responses to absent leadership impacted the organization?

Q.25. How has the unit progressed or regressed during this period of absent leadership? Explain.

Q.26. Have you or your colleagues attempted to institute any changes during this period of absent leadership, or been asked to assess the role of leader or follower by the organization?

Q.27. If so, has the organization attempted any such changes during this period of absent leadership?

Q.28. How would you summarize the meaning of your experience of absent leadership?

Q.29. What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon?

Q.30. Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to:

- a. The organization's handling of the absent leadership?
- b. The role of the follower during periods of absent leadership?

Appendix B: Interview Guide – HR Executives

In an effort to alleviate or diminish potential superficiality or convergence in responses elicited from the individual follower participants, HR executives may be called upon for the purpose of injecting the perspective of intelligent observers via his or her experience during the leadership absence period. As a means to connect these questions with the corresponding queries directed at individual follower participants, the question sets have been identified as Set Two and Set Three. Question numbers correspond to those questions in the follower interviews, as illustrated:

Set Two: Absent Leadership (via in-person, phone, or Skype interview).

Q.8. How long was the period of absent leadership present in the organization?

Q.9. If there was a substitute for leadership during that period, how was it exercised?

Q.10. What was the impact of the absence of leadership on the organization?

Q.11. Did the group's response to the absence of leadership result in:

- a. More or less productivity?
- b. A higher or lower morale level?
- c. Lack of direction about what to do?
- d. More or fewer interpersonal behavior issues (how peers got along together)?
- e. Improved or worsened decision-making that normally required a leader?

Q.12. How has the work unit functioned during this absence of leadership?

Q.13. Are there positive aspects about not having a leader at the moment?

Q.14. Are/were any followers motivated to become a leader of the group? Why or why not? Will the replacement come from within the group or be a new person?

Q.15. Is leadership needed now? Explain.

Q.16. Has the work unit improved or declined in cohesion and productivity during this absence of leadership?

Set Three: The Behavior of Followers and the Organization – The way people think about leaders and followers is very important in any organization (continued in-person, verbal questions).

Q.17. Based on your experience, what need was there for leadership and how are the leaders' and followers' roles different?

Q.18. What can you say about the expected relationship between the followers and the leader?

Q.19. What new responsibilities or tasks have been expected of the various followers or of the group if any during this period of absent leadership? What were the responses to those expectations?

Q.20. Have you felt or seen a new sense of empowerment as a result? Why or why not?

Q.21. Describe the perceived motivation of the followers during the period of absent leadership.

Q.22. What successes or challenges did the followers experience during this time?

Q.23. What new skill sets were acquired during this time, if any?

Q.24. How have the followers' actions and responses to absent leadership impacted the organization?

Q.25. How has the unit progressed or regressed during this period of absent leadership? Explain.

Q.26. Have you or your colleagues attempted to institute any changes during this period of absent leadership?

Q.27. If so, has the organization attempted any such changes during this period of absent leadership?

Q.30. Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to:

- a. The organization's handling of the absent leadership?
- b. The role of the follower during periods of absent leadership?

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation to Organizations

Date _____

Dear _____,

My name is Robert Leonard. I am a doctoral candidate in the Management Department at Walden University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Leadership and Organizational Change, and I would like to invite members of your organization to participate. The purpose of my study is to investigate the role of followers during periods of absent leadership. Should you decide to permit employees to take part in this study, they will each be asked to participate in an interview with me, which is designed to last approximately one hour. I am seeking to interview at least five employees from your organization who have experienced working under conditions of absent leadership for a period of at least three months, and may also request an interview with your HR executive as well to confirm responses. There are minimal risks on the part of the organization or the individual participants to take part in this study.

A select group of your organization's employee followers will be asked a series of questions designed to elicit information that leads to a better understanding of 1) What experiences take place in terms of the phenomenon of absent leadership, and 2) What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected this experience. In all, approximately 30 questions will be asked; 5-7 questions in writing and the remainder will be administered verbally. The interviews will take place via in-person meeting, phone, or Skype, and at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The sessions will be audio recorded so that I may accurately reflect on the discussion. The recordings will only be reviewed by me, as data analyst and coder. Interviews are expected to take up to one hour each. It is my hope that you would forward invitations to potential participants on my behalf; however, should you wish to provide me with the necessary contact information for each potential participant, I will contact each directly.

Participation in this study will not require that your organization's employees answer any questions about which they feel uncomfortable. Although the organization may not benefit directly from participating in this study, I hope that this research may ultimately benefit other organizations with regard to the way that followers are prepared for, and react to, periods of absent leadership. In that vein, it is my hope that an element of social and organizational change will result.

Please know that participation is confidential. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings; however, participants and their organizations will remain confidential, which means that no one will know which responses to the questions have been elicited from your organization or from the individuals being interviewed.

Further, no monetary compensation or other remuneration will be provided for participation in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary, and is the decision of each individual participant. Interview participants have the right to discontinue participation in the study at any time.

I will gladly provide the list of questions in advance, should you so request. I am also available via phone (301.639.0770) or email (robert.leonard@waldenu.edu) to discuss any other aspects of this study or to answer any questions you may have. Additionally, the final study and results will be made available to all participating individuals and their respective organizations upon completion of the study.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact me directly at the address, phone, or email listed below. If you wish to confirm my candidacy as a doctoral student at Walden University, please contact Walden University's Research Participant Advocate (612.312.1210 or via email at irb@waldenu.edu).

Thank you in advance for your consideration. A Letter of Cooperation and Confidentiality is included should your organization choose to participate in this study. Upon receipt of this signed form, I will contact your organization's HR executive to identify potential participants and to schedule the interviews. To assure confidentiality and privacy, each individual participant will receive forms to address their rights as participants and their consent to take part in this study.

I will call within two weeks to see if your organization is willing to participate.

Best regards,
Robert Leonard
PhD Candidate, Walden University

Enclosure 1: Permission for Participation – Study: The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership.

To:
Robert Leonard

Re: Research Study – The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership

From:

(Community Research Partner / Organization)

Date

Dear Robert Leonard,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership* with our organization as a Community Research Partner. As part of this study, I authorize you to contact our organization's HR executive _____ at _____ (phone or email) for the purpose of recruitment, data collection, member checking, and results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include use of interview space and the allocation of approximately one hour for each interview participant on the day and time agreed upon for each interview. We further understand that all interviews will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription by the researcher. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorized Official

Contact Information

Appendix D: Letter of Invitation and Consent for Individual Follower Participants

Date

Dear _____,

My name is Robert Leonard. I am a doctoral candidate in the Management Department at Walden University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Leadership and Organizational Change, and would like to invite you to participate in my research study on The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership. Your organization has approved your voluntary participation in this study, which has been designed to investigate the role of followers during periods of absent leadership, a scenario which you have experienced. Please note that this approval on the part of your organization does not constitute any obligation on your part to agree to individual participation. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Although the organization may not benefit directly for participating in this study, I hope that this research may ultimately benefit other organizations with regard to the way that followers are prepared for, and react to, periods of absent leadership. In that vein, it is my hope that an element of social and organizational change will result.

Following this interview, you will be afforded an opportunity to review the data collected by the researcher. Corrections will then be made to your interview responses, as necessary, should you perceive any incorrect interpretations. There are minimal risks on your part as a participant in this study. Please read and sign the following Consent Form, and return it to me at the address below at your earliest convenience. Do not return it to your HR executive.

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

1. EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH and WHAT YOU WILL DO:
 - i. You are being asked to participate in the research study on The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership.
 - ii. Approximately 30 questions will be asked of you. The first set of 7 questions will be administered in writing and are expected to take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The remaining questions will be asked in an individual verbal interview session which will take place via in-person, phone, or Skype depending upon your preference, and will take approximately one hour to complete.
 - iii. This interview will be scheduled for a mutually agreeable day, time and place.

- iv. The session will be audio recorded for the purpose of accurate reflection on the discussion, and will only be reviewed by Robert Leonard, as data analyst and coder.
2. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:
 - i. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may also change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.
 3. CONFIDENTIALITY:
 - i. Your individual responses will be private and will not be shared with any other member of your organization.
 - ii. Your name will remain confidential in the final study report, and will not be openly known to readers.
 4. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:
 - i. There is no cost to participate in this study.
 - ii. Participants will not be reimbursed or receive any other remuneration for their participation.
 5. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:
 - i. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact me directly at the address, phone, or email listed below.
 - ii. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Walden representative at 612.312.1210 who can discuss this with you.
 6. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT:
 - i. Voluntary agreement to participate in this study is hereby noted by the signatures and dates below.
 - ii. The researcher will provide a summary of the study results to the interview participant.
 - iii. The researcher will provide a copy of the final study, upon request.

The signature and printed name are both required below:

Signature	Printed Name	Date
Contact phone	Contact email (not a work email address)	

Upon receipt of this signed Consent Form, I will contact you directly to schedule the interview.

Best regards,
Robert Leonard
PhD Candidate, Walden University

Appendix E: Letter of Invitation and Consent for HR Executive Participants

Date

Dear _____,

Thank you for your assistance in arranging for your organization's participation in my research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Leadership and Organizational Change at Walden University. Your organization has approved your voluntary participation in this study, which has been designed to investigate the role of followers during periods of absent leadership. Please note that this approval on the part of your organization does not constitute any obligation on your part to agree to individual participation. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Following my interviews with individual followers within your organization, I shall request an interview with you as well to validate and clarify information from the perspective of an intelligent observer. Although the organization may not benefit directly for participating in this study, I hope that this research may ultimately benefit other organizations with regard to the way that followers are prepared for, and react to, periods of absent leadership. In that vein, it is my hope that an element of social and organizational change will result.

Following this interview, you will be afforded an opportunity to review the data collected by the researcher. Corrections will then be made to your interview responses, as necessary, should you perceive any incorrect interpretations. There are minimal risks on your part as a participant in this study. Please read and sign the following Consent Form, and return it to me at the address below at your earliest convenience.

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

1. **EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH and WHAT YOU WILL DO:**
 - i. You are being asked to participate in the research study on The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership.
 - ii. Approximately 20 questions will be asked of you via in-person, phone, or Skype depending upon your preference.
 - iii. This interview will be scheduled for a mutually agreeable day, time and place and may last approximately one hour.
 - iv. The session will be audio recorded for the purpose of accurate reflection on the discussion, and will only be reviewed by Robert Leonard, as data analyst and coder.

2. **YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:**

- i. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may also change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.
- ii. Participants in this study will have no personal relationship, either formal or informal, with the researcher.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY:

- i. Your individual responses will be private and will not be shared with any other member of your organization.
- ii. Your name will remain confidential in the final study report, and will not be openly known to readers.

4. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

- i. There is no cost to participate in this study.
- ii. Participants will not be reimbursed or receive any other remuneration for their participation.

5. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

- i. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact me directly at the address, phone, or email listed below.
- ii. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Walden representative at 612.312.1210 who can discuss this with you.

6. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT:

- i. Voluntary agreement to participate in this study is hereby noted by the signatures and dates below.
- ii. The researcher will provide a summary of the study results to the interview participant.

The researcher will provide a copy of the final study, upon request.

The signature and printed name are both required below:

Signature	Printed Name	Date
Contact phone	Contact email	

Thank you again for your participation. Upon receipt of this signed Consent Form, I will contact you directly to schedule the interview, as needed.

Best regards,

Robert Leonard
PhD Candidate, Walden University

Appendix F: New Responsibilities, Skill Sets, and Adjustments for Followers During
Periods of Absent Leadership

<p>We've really had to step up and be accountable for decisions because we're all responsible now for what we decide. Everyone was all-in at first but when things don't go the way you think they will, with people not really pulling their weight without someone looking over their shoulder, problems arise.</p>
<p>A big thing was ensuring an increasing amount of communication and showing more visual effort in the company.</p>
<p>There are so many things to list here. Some followers are very content in that role and do not seek to experience the leader role. Recognizing that is key and reassuring them that they are valuable to the organization is critical to maintaining their trust and engendering their sense of self-worth and contribution to the organization.</p>
<p>There was redistribution of the section supervisor's tasks. I personally was not happy about it, as I was already fully subscribed to another task and didn't want to add more things to my plate.</p>
<p>I've seen some of the people just go along and not really care but others want to step up and move the cause forward. Those are the people who should be the next leaders.</p>
<p>New processes have been instituted whereby there is even more control on the part of the new leader and less flexibility on the part of the followers is allowed. This has not been received well.</p>
<p>By most, the attempt is there to do and make the right choices but it's a struggle. Everything always seems to be behind or lacking in some way with the business. Another role by a so-called leader is "He's doing it his way so it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks."</p>
<p>Our previous director would assign leadership to separate followers on separate tasks. That's why the wheels kept turning in his absence. And our followers naturally picked up any slack.</p>
<p>We all just took on what was needed.</p>
<p>We did attempt changes during the period of absent leadership and it appeared to be going well. When the new formal leader actually began taking action then more unclear responsibilities were given and decision making lacked.</p>
<p>Making day-to-day decisions and knowing what issues to forward to [the owner] was key. I think overall staff rose to the challenge.</p>
<p>Some followers continue to perform as always while others tend to let absence of leadership lull them into a more relaxed work state which sometimes leads to decreases in work performance.</p>
<p>I definitely learned to manage my own work better without being hounded to get things done.</p>
<p>We learned to better manage our own time and to coach peers effectively.</p>
<p>Delegation, teaming, decision making, motivation. Quite a lot.</p>

There was nothing particularly new per se. Just knowing what we knew was there and gaining confidence with skills each time they were used.

Mostly, we learned to stay calm under fire.

I think teamwork was the big thing. We really learned to improve on that.

Communication mostly.

Appendix G: Followers' Experience of the Phenomena of Absent Leadership

I think we improved without the leader. Once it was recognized that we didn't really need [leader] here to watch everything we were doing, I think the company was concerned that we might eventually become chaotic and get too loose. I think it scared management a bit.

There should be a hierarchy of management in place so that it can step up and take responsibility. There was no real definition among managers as to whom would take leadership.

It made me wonder if the organization even realizes that we didn't need a leader because we have good people.

When a leader returns from an absence or a new one is put in his or her place, expect a sudden need for control to come back into play. Some leaders see control and power being one and the same.

Overall I feel that the [team] performed well with the lack of constant leadership.

I think some sort of leader needs to be involved but not one who is bossy and controlling. The leader should help the team succeed and teach them what they don't know and the followers should be able to learn from the leader and replace them effectively when needed. I didn't see this type of dynamic happening in the experience.

The absence of leadership led to structural breakdown and lack of meaning or worth within the organization. Leadership is the bond that makes a successful business whether big or small. Our business is struggling with this as we speak.

Appendix H: Impact on the Organization – Health Care

I found myself doing other jobs outside what is expected of me. I found other departments within the organization to be taking on a less responsible role, at times almost like taking advantage with no leadership there, as in them being less efficient, lack of accountability, low apathy, and we versus them attitude. There was a loss of team sight and more of personal role and individual belief. All in all it was very disheartening.

Things ran more smoothly in that decisions were made more quickly and not bogged down in approvals.

Certain projects and reports were unable to be concluded without proper authorization.

I feel for our group, the organization lacked follow through and confidence building. We can be a great organization and yet still have areas of improvement. Sometimes there are areas in an organization that are strong and we continue to focus on the strength. We still have to figure out where there are downfalls occurring and what we can do to prevent a crash.

It was all for the better. We didn't have to worry about people looking over our shoulders so much.

Not everybody wants to be the leader and shouldn't be anyway. The followers who cared enough to work harder are the ones who the organization should pay attention to because they helped keep things going.

Appendix I: Impact on the Organization – Real Estate Management

Things weren't as tense. We had more freedom to make decisions. We were more productive and got more done.
I think we learned that the owner was really mostly a figurehead and not as important as he thought he was.
I think we all chipped in more and contributed better to the overall work effort.
I felt the business was not affected overall but processes were streamlined for the good of everyone.
Overall I feel that the organization performed well with the lack of constant leadership.
We kept on top of things and I think that was good for the company.
It made me wonder if the organization even realizes that we didn't need a leader because we have good people.
Things went on pretty much as normal. It was more relaxed and we worked even harder.

Appendix J: Impact on the Organization – Human Capital Management

<p>It was really hard to know who is in charge and who wanted to be in charge.</p>
<p>It was really challenging.</p>
<p>Our team began to wonder about the company's direction and if our jobs were secure because it didn't seem all that urgent or important to get the right person in place.</p>
<p>The lack of purpose of our team is not understood by a few other leaders.</p>
<p>The impact was not huge. It really was a smooth transition. The only thing that may have changed was that there were no decisions being made until the new VP got into place and began to move things forward how he saw fit.</p>
<p>It made you question your career path and the stability of the organization became a concern.</p>
<p>I can't tell. The organization hasn't really provided any feedback or comments on how we are doing.</p>
<p>I don't think the company responded well to us not having a leader in place or to how well we were able to work together without [omit name]. And then they didn't seem to really take any action to make changes afterwards.</p>
<p>There was a high need for leadership, but it was never quality leadership. The high quality leadership came from the department leaders and managers instead of the owners.</p>

Appendix K: Impact on the Organization – Local Government

Often it creates a pause in things as operations are sorting through their options – one to make the boss look good and the other to make the boss happy. Schedule demands are often very imposing and that causes work to be less than ideally completed in order to meet the urgent deadline. All deadlines are urgent (for example, we need this by COB today). Our current culture’s need for instant gratification has bled into the taskers, actions and other operational day to day activities are frequently initiated with a day or two suspense.
It’s hard when you don’t know where to go for answers sometimes.
Somewhat demoralizing, as the section supervisor was an extremely experienced and strong leader and a very good engineer. His skills have been difficult-to-impossible to fully replace.
It really makes it hard to keep business as usual without hiccups because many of us look to others for direction. Not to say we can’t do our jobs without a leader but just that it causes challenges.
No direction as to where to seek guidance.
None of the managers felt capable of making a decision. Everything had to be submitted by email and we would wait for a response. We were unable to move forward, but just kept status quo.
I estimate that in 70% of the cases – it results in followers augmenting their skills to include leading others. We also find our best new ideas from those that haven’t had the opportunity or inclination to share those ideas. The remaining 30% of the cases are where followers learn that leading is not a forte for them and in the rare cases where followers don’t recognize this, leadership needs to step in and have a focused feedback session identifying where things aren’t well, and alternatives to pursue to improve them.

Appendix L: Organizational Response to Absent Leadership

I don't think the company responded well to us not having a leader in place or to how well we were able to work together without [omit name]. And then they didn't seem to really take any action to make changes afterwards.
I can't tell. The organization hasn't really provided any feedback or comments on how we are doing.
I don't think they are doing anything at all.
There are now processes in a to-be-determined phase to see a change in role responsibilities.
Our organization attempted to create joint efforts in a pilot mode. The pilot only selected one individual from the team. The one individual's usual responsibilities were taken out by the remaining members. The changes were placed on hold and the overall communication was not shared with the entire organization.
I feel for our group, the organization lacked follow through and confidence building. We can be a great organization and yet still have areas of improvement. Sometimes there are areas in an organization that are strong and we continue to focus on the strength. We still have to figure out where there are downfalls occurring and what we can do to prevent a crash.
No changes were implemented.
We are in constant change so I guess the organization will think seriously about the experience and make changes if necessary.
We tried to implement new chains of decision making and check points for project management but the leader squashed all that upon her return.
It was poorly handled. Followers had little direction as to what happened during the absent leadership and then when they tried to act in logical professional ways, they were eventually squashed again.
Well yes, some changes were made, due to necessity. But no, we were never asked to assess the role of leader at any time.
It made me wonder if the organization even realizes that we didn't need a leader because we have good people.

Appendix M: Followers' Perception of the Relationship Between Leaders and Followers

We didn't have a lot of trust in the old leader and that was a big problem. It needs to be there for teams to work well together.
Leaders are more motivated and energized. Followers are unsure and at times disorganized.
The leader is more in tune with their expectations while the follower is undecided about the next step.
Leaders bring positive results and moving forward but followers are still followers.
There should be a lot of trust between them and they should respect each other's job responsibilities and goals.
The leader has pull on what each follower can be accountable for. The follower does not have the ability to make the final decision.
Trust is important. The lack of it causes an increase in the amount of inaccuracies and confusions.
The expected relationship would be that leaders and followers will partner together to ensure success with leaders' know-how and vision, keeping an eye on the progress and next steps.
They are not different. Everyone is both a leader and a follower. It's just a matter of context or perspective. The acts of leading or following are different for sure. One role is informed of the other and in highly functioning organizations, you'll observe that the feedback loop is very active and welcome amongst those following and those leading.
Followers want to trust their leaders, but that trust has to be earned continually. Should it be lost, it takes an incredibly long time to reestablish. It's often quicker to replace the leader and embark on establishing a new trust relationship with the followers.
Someone needs to make decisions but I don't think that person is always the leader or the best leader and definitely not always the person who others want to be led by.
As long as each other is respectful and understand their roles then everybody gets along fine.
The leader was needed to provide guidance as well as holding followers to a high standard of performance. These followers were all rather independent, with good skill sets, but tended to benefit from the previous leader's activities.
This is not a hierarchal situation, but the leader ideally would be able to provide guidance to the efforts of team members.
In [this industry's] work, I don't know if they're really all that different. I mean, one person might get the spotlight and the credit but everyone needs to be a leader in terms of bringing something of value to the table.
The key is trust and it has to be a two way street. You can't trust a leader who isn't trusting of others because it's probably in her nature to be untrustworthy herself.
Leadership is necessary but when it is micro-management and stifling it is not good for the organization. The roles are different in that followers are reduced to "yes" people when they are not permitted to make decisions without excessive oversight from

formal leaders.
It should support in both directions, not a dictatorship or military style directives.
Followers create good leaders, not vice versa.
There will always be some degree of friction between some leaders and some followers.
Usually leaders will define roles, allocate tasks, and keep tabs on all progress, settle any miscommunications or disputes, congratulate successful operations, and suggest improvements. Followers should stay the course once tasked with a role and report any needs.
You would think a leader is needed but when you have good people working in a company you sometimes find that all that doesn't matter so much.
In our business, we sometimes get on pretty level playing fields so it's just a matter of knowing how to get along.
The expected relationship should be one of mutual respect and trust.
I think it always helps to have someone to go to but I don't really think we need a single leader as a figurehead. We're not that type of organization.
The leader should provide direction but get out of the way so the followers who do the real work can actually do it.
It should be one of mutual respect. Too often the leader doesn't respect his employees and in return doesn't earn respect himself.
Followers are actually leaders in disguise. We can all lead when we have to.

Appendix N: Followers' Perception of Having No Formal Leader

Without a leader, we seemed to have more urgency and were not feeling like we had to do everything that one person dictated.
It feels good to have no one hovering over you and treating you like a child, telling you how to do every little thing.
[Having no leader] allowed the individual unit to be able to develop on how to function independently when necessary.
It allows others to step up. If no one self-nominates themselves as the lead person for an activity or team, then it's a chance to nudge those folks you think are capable but are still holding on to some doubt.
I think it's always good to have opportunities for followers to step up and see what they can do when no one's in charge.
Employees took more ownership of projects and assumed roles of greater decision making without being micro-managed.
We experienced real time solutions and decisions, and empowerment for management as a whole instead of a select individual.
The office seems to display less stress when leadership is not present.
Yes, there were positive aspects of not having a leader. Everyone seemed to take more ownership and pride in their particular tasks.
Everybody seemed a little more relaxed without the boss' watchful eye around.
Absolutely. We took real control of our work and made it happen.
It made for better communication as a team.

Appendix O: The Meaning of Absent Leadership

<p>Maybe I haven't been here long enough, but I thought we were doing pretty ok without a formal leader but the company doesn't seem to agree. The absent leadership experience for me gave me and my teammates a chance to see what we were really made of.</p>
<p>It's been a challenge but also an exciting chance to see what we can do. We're all adults here and were hired because we can do our jobs so we don't need someone all over us all the time making sure we do it right. I think not having a leader has been a positive thing.</p>
<p>Absent formal title leadership can be successful, as long as each individual in a particular team has a great understanding with the ultimate goal, can be trustworthy and accountable, can agree to make a final decision, move forward, and have a decent amount of communication skills. The downfall with absent leadership is that without having pull on direction and being able to make a decision and move forward to get a result, the team reaches a limit.</p>
<p>I thought it was excellent to know that the team can keep moving without the presence of a formal leader.</p>
<p>It is persistent and recurring and you need to develop techniques to cope when it occurs. Assume noble intent in others and keep a sharp eye out for your emerging leaders.</p>
<p>It left me more conscious of needing back-up strategies in case various work situations should change. I developed more of an appreciation for the absent leader, who as I suggested was very good at his job.</p>
<p>I think it's important for organizations to know that not everyone is cut out to be a leader and not every leader can lead well.</p>
<p>It was eye opening. Followers sometimes don't need formal hand holding, over the shoulder micro-management. They just need to be respected and given the chance to do the jobs they were hired to do.</p>
<p>I carry the title of Manager and it was great to function in that capacity. I felt things went well and I was able to deliver value to our clients. Now I feel it is just a title and no decisions are my own to make.</p>
<p>Absence of leadership leads to structural breakdown and lack of meaning or worth within the corporation. Leadership is the bond that makes a successful business whether big or small. Our business is struggling with this as we speak.</p>
<p>It was great!</p>
<p>I learned that even though someone is the boss it doesn't necessarily mean that he is needed in every aspect of the organization's functions if you have good people doing the work.</p>

It was hard at first because we wondered what would happen next but then we realized we didn't have time to sit around and wonder anymore. We just had to do our jobs the way we always did.

It made me feel good actually, to know that we could do the job on our own.

In our situation, things vastly improved when we didn't have to worry about a micro-managing leader. We could do our jobs much better.

Appendix P: Sample Interview Transcript

Set One: Profile.

Q.1. What is your role in the organization? Service Center Mentor II.

Q.2. How long have you been in this role in this organization? Almost 7 Years.

Q.3. What are your responsibilities? I monitor associate and client interactions and provide consistent feedback to help in the overall development of associates and success of company. I also constantly attend meetings to ensure client focus is the end result.

Q.4. What are your strengths and weaknesses in this role? Being able to provide constructive feedback. Being able to do comparisons based on experience and strengths. The weakness of this role is overall accountability.

Q.5. What are the greatest challenges in this role? Lack of support. Reinforcement. Confusion when working towards an ultimate goal.

Q.6. What is your title? Service Center Mentor II

Q.7. How long have you been employed by [the organization]? Almost 12 years

Set Two: Absent Leadership.

Q.8. How long was the period of absent leadership present in the organization? While we currently have a formal leader I think it is still absent to-date. Yet the formal leader does have the ability to get things pushed through within the organization. On estimate, the period of absent leadership for our group was probably around 7 months.

Q.9. If there was a substitute for leadership during that period, how was it exercised? A team decision with using resources or connecting with other formal leaders.

Q.10. What was the impact of the absence of leadership on you and the organization?

The lack of purpose of our team is not understood by a few other leaders.

Q.11. How did the group as a whole respond to the absence of leadership? Our team, I thought, was apparently great with communicating with each other and things to do, completing deadlines, taking initiative on projects and accomplishing them individually and together to meet deadlines.

- a. *Was it more or less productive?* I thought more productive.
- b. *Was morale higher or lower?* I thought morale was higher at this point.
- c. *Was there any lack of direction about what to do?* The communication within our team leadership seemed pretty clear.
- d. *Were there more or fewer interpersonal behavior issues?* I thought the conflicts were fewer.
- e. *How did the followers handle decisions that normally required a leader?* I think our team seemed to be able to make decisions quicker with agreement and alignment.

Q.12. How has the work unit functioned during this absence of leadership? We seemed to be more effective.

Q.13. Are there positive aspects about not having a leader at the moment? We knew we had to make a decision and meet deadline and ensure we clearly communicated with each other.

Q.14. Are or were any followers motivated to become a leader of the group? I think we may have all wanted to become a leader of the group. *Why?* For one instance, someone

on our team became a LEAD for their entire building activities committee and completed the emerging leadership program. *Will the replacement come from within the group or be a new person?* Our current leader is from within our department that received a promotion.

Q.15. Is leadership needed now, and if so can you explain? Yes, because the direction of where our team is supposed to be at is now confused. Responsibilities seem to be unclear and/or changing weekly. Trust has been reduced. Accountability is not consistent amongst the entire team.

Q.16. Has the work unit improved or declined in cohesion and productivity during this absence of leadership? I had thought the work unit was improving when leadership was absent and then when we received a leader it became worse.

Set Three: The Behavior of Followers and the Organization – The way people think about leaders and followers is very important in any organization.

Q.17. Based on your experience, what need was there for leadership and how are the leaders' and followers' roles different? The leader has pull on what each follower can be accountable for. The follower does not have the ability to make the final decision.

Q.18. What can you say about the expected relationship between the followers and the leader? Trust is important. The lack of it causes an increase in the amount of inaccuracies and confusion.

Q.19. What new responsibilities or tasks have been expected of the various followers or of the group if any during this period of absent leadership? Ensuring an increasing amount of communication and showing more visual effort in the company. *What were the*

responses to those expectations? Mixed. There was vocal agreement, yet disparities occurred privately.

Q.20. Have you felt or seen a new sense of empowerment as a result? My empowerment has diminished. Why? My expected results did not occur.

Q.21. Describe the perceived motivation of the followers during the period of absent leadership. Motivation began decreasing as leadership support lacked.

Q.22. What successes or challenges did the followers experience during this time? Success – the majority of team became a stronger unit. Challenges is there was a hidden goal that resulted in a few team members seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Q.23. What new skill sets were acquired during this time, if any? Management of our own time. Coaching peers effectively.

Q.24. How have the followers' actions and responses to absent leadership impacted the organization? There are now processes in a to-be-determined phase to see a change in role responsibilities.

Q.25. How has the unit progressed or regressed during this period of absent leadership? The unit progressed and then regressed. *Can you explain what you mean by that?* The unit was doing well as it seemed we all had leadership responsibility and worked well together without a formal leader in play. It regressed as we came to realize we can work as a team, yet without the formal leadership title – we had a lot of limits put on us.

Q.26. Have you or your colleagues attempted to institute any changes during this period of absent leadership, or been asked to assess the role of leader or follower by the organization? We did attempt changes during the period absent leadership and it

appeared to be going well. When the formal leader actually began taking action, then more unclear responsibilities were given and decision making lacked.

Q.27. Has the organization attempted any such changes during this period of absent leadership? Our organization attempted to create joint efforts in a pilot mode. The pilot only selected one individual from the team. The one individual's usual responsibilities were taken out by the remaining members left. The changes were placed on hold and the overall communication was not shared with the entire organization.

Q.28. How would you summarize the meaning of your experience of absent leadership? Absent formal title leadership can be successful, as long as each individual in a particular team has a great understanding with the ultimate goal, can be trustworthy and accountable, can agree to make a final decision, move forward, and have a decent amount of communication skills. The downfall with absent leadership is that without having pull on direction and being able to make a decision and move forward to get a result, the team reaches a limit.

Q.29. What texts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon? My answers have been based on recent events and those recent events have not resulted in positive overall end results. I have read several articles and a few books regarding being a follower. Leadership/management books. Each has a similar perspective yet differences as well. Trustworthy is a word that is currently stuck in my mind throughout my readings. And without that, I feel we lack success.

Q.30. Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to:

- a. *The organization's handling of the absent leadership?* I feel for our group, the organization lacked follow through and confidence building. We can be a great organization and yet still have areas of improvement. Sometimes there are areas in an organization that are strong and we continue to focus on the strength. We still have to figure out where there are downfalls occurring and what we can do to prevent a crash.
- b. *The role of the follower during periods of absent leadership?* We have a follower on our team that lacked appropriate communication. Words documented in writing usually missed their goal. They vocally lacked focus and multi-tasking was ineffective for them.

Appendix Q: Research Memo Journal

Type	Name	Memo Notes
Memo	IRB approval	4/8/2014 9:19 PM IRB Approval Received
Memo	Community partners	4/11/2014 7:02 AM Tough getting HR approvals for participation
Memo	Participants scheduled	4/19/2014 4:16 AM Scheduled 3 HCM; 2 LG; 1 REM
Memo	Themes	4/28/2014 8:18 PM Seeing early recurring themes of trust and respect as a necessary function of the leader-follower dynamic; surprising comments suggesting organization's lack of concern or apparent interest in recognizing how the absent leadership scenario is affecting the followers (Researcher reflection – have felt the trust/respect issue in similar scenarios as well; natural to expect trust and respect when you feel you are giving same; interesting how different the industries are with LG being so accustomed to lack of clarity and leader turnover while HCM followers are not responding well; LG followers seem to be dealing with the absent leader scenario better, perhaps as a function of being accustomed to the situation;)
Memo	Participants scheduled	4/29/2014 6:31 Scheduled PM 1 HCM; 3 LG; 2 REM
Memo	Participants scheduled	4/30/2014 7:01 PM Scheduled 1 HCare
Memo	Themes	5/1/2014 6:06 AM Mutual respect; freedom to make decisions; (Researcher reflection – two way street needed; not a good feeling when it seems all one sided on the give and take issue; another interesting new observation, that REM followers do not seem to express a need for formal leadership and consider themselves more on an equal playing field with their leader)
Memo	Themes	5/6/2014 12:13 AM Decreased tenseness, but leadership still needed; confusion and lack of direction; does the organization even care about what's going on? (Researcher reflection – Recall from similar experiences the tendency to feel lost and wondering if a leader will step in or if the company is paying attention)
Memo	Participants scheduled	5/7/2014 10:17 PM Scheduled 2 REM; 1 HCare
Memo	Participants scheduled	5/12/2014 5:29 AM Scheduled 1 HCare; 1 HCM
Memo	Themes	5/17/2014 4:18 AM Not sure who is in charge at times a recurring theme; once again, no organizational response to the situation for yet another group of followers; demoralizing at times; lack of clarity although that is not unusual for LG companies; (Researcher reflection – HCM followers seem to be reeling with the absent leadership scenario and the apparent lack of concern by their organization, yet they still sense productivity in the group; is it a false sense of accomplishment since measurements and accountability are

		diminishing?; empowerment up almost across the board, again is this a new sense of “freedom” from the watchful eye?)
Memo	Themes	5/18/2014 10:49 PM Seems to be less disruption with no formal leader; (Researcher reflection – can give a sense of freedom and “smooth sailing” when no one person is directing or watching)
Memo	Themes	5/20/2014 6:55 AM Sense of getting more accomplished, across all industries; in cases where leader has returned/replaced, sense of worse situation than with the absence or before the absence; recurring theme of not knowing if the organization is aware of what’ going on; desperation on the part of HCM followers
Memo	Themes	5/20/2014 11:36 PM (Researcher reflection – rise and appreciation of need for group communication; time management on the rise; some followers seen as just doing “business as usual” by peers but only negatively affecting a few of those willing to step up; indications that having no formal leader may be a better solution; surprise by followers at what they can/have accomplished; productivity generally construed as lower, but morale is very high during absent leadership and conflict is well decreased; some indicating confusion regarding processes, where to go for answers; overall more satisfactory workplace being reported; sense of empowerment is up and motivation skyrocketed during absent leadership; (Researcher reflection – seems logical in that it is common to interpret management and leadership as merely oversight and “big brother” rather than guidance and mentorship; great comment: “Followers create good leaders, not vice versa.”)
Memo	Themes	5/22/2014 12:08 AM Looking for someone to lead, but not necessarily the formal appointed leader; followers often not showing much interest in replacing the leader but willing to step up and do what needs to be done; sense of more satisfactory workplace with no formal leader; (Researcher reflection – may be tied to perception of freedom to make decisions, new sense of empowerment; chance to be a leader without the responsibility of the title)
Memo	Participants scheduled	5/23/2014 11:19 PM Scheduled 2 HCare
Memo	Themes	5/22/2014 11:44 AM (Researcher reflection – interesting how different organizational situations and within different industries lead to very different views of the need for formal leadership)
Memo	Themes	6/1/2014 9:16 AM Followers are reporting that the organization does not appreciate their value or capabilities, or at least don't respond in a way that suggests they recognize this; (Researcher reflection – this is a big concern and very counterintuitive to what one might expect to hear about the way organizations are responding to the absent leadership scenarios)
Memo	Themes	6/2/2014 1:22 AM Group decision making has been viewed as much improved and valued in the group environment; (Researcher reflection – observation has led to the consideration that there simply are those who excel without direct formal leadership; really big concern is the perception that the organizations are oblivious to the need for

		something to be done to ease the leader absence; this was absolutely not expected and is a surprise; no one likes to feel like they're flying wildly in the breeze with no direction; wonder how different the perceptions of the leader-follower relationship would differ if that question had been asked prior to an absent leadership scenario and then again after it, as well as during)
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Curriculum Vitae

ROBERT A. LEONARD

PhD Management: Leadership & Organizational Change

Education:

PhD Management • 2014

Walden University, Minneapolis, MN

- Specialization: Leadership & Organizational Change
- Dissertation Topic: The Role of Followership During Periods of Absent Leadership
- Peer Mentor / Dissertation Cohort Leader
- GPA: 3.91

MBA: Marketing/Management • 1993

University of Baltimore, Baltimore, MD

- GPA: 3.13

BA: Communications • 1987

Loyola College, Baltimore, MD

- Minors: Advertising / Public Relations
- Fine Arts Award, 1987
- GPA: 3.33

Teaching Experience:

Adjunct Faculty: Communications • 2002

Loyola College, Baltimore, MD

Undergraduate communications and public relations.

Agency Development & Training Specialist • 1998-2000

State Farm Insurance Companies, Frederick, MD

Classroom instruction for insurance agents, staff, and internal associates.

Related Professional Experience:

CAMP LETTERMAN VILLAGE & PARK, Gettysburg, PA • 2014 to Present
 Medical education and tourism project dedicated to the memory of Dr. Jonathan Letterman, the major figure in Civil War Medicine for the United States.

Director of Professional Relations

Overseeing marketing, strategic business relationships, and communications.

- Responsible for development of short- and long-term plans and budgets for the collective Professional Relations programs and activities.
- Act as organization's representative with the media.
- Manage branding, marketing, communications, and business development initiatives.
- Identify potential business partners and conducts market research for the development of marketing plans, products, services, and business areas.
- Lead and direct roles focused on marketing, business development, creative services, social media, and event management.
- Facilitate historical and educational programs and classroom experiences.

ADAMS COUNTY WINERY, Orrtanna, PA • 2012 to 2014
 Nationally recognized producer of award-winning wines.

Marketing & Business Development Manager

Driving marketing, business development, and events management.

- Responsible for new business development and maintenance of existing business.
- Coordinated all media relations and related activities.
- Managed relationships and partnerships with hotels, restaurants, realtors, customers, and farm markets to drive market presence, annual giving, and club memberships.

AL BETZ & ASSOCIATES, INC., Westminster, MD • 2009 to 2011
 Established court reporting firm with local offices and nationwide services.

Director, Marketing and Project Management

Spearheaded marketing, communications, business development, and project management initiatives.

- Developed presentation materials for executive members.
- Responsible for firm's largest account in 34 year history.
- Coordinated and supervised photo and video shoots.

INTERNATIONAL ONCOLOGY NETWORK, Frisco, TX; Baltimore, MD • 2006-2009

Subsidiary of Fortune 27 Company, providing group purchasing services, including drug distribution, clinical research, and consultancy, to oncologists and other specialty physicians as liaison to major international drug manufacturers.

Director, Marketing & Communications

Led team of 5 as Director of Marketing and Communications; managed development of internal communications, including newsletters and executive messaging as well as client communications, including marketing updates and newsletters. Developed and drove strategic marketing plan; held accountability for budget. Collaborated with 12 sister companies to drive branding and consistent market messaging.

Served as Managing Editor for quarterly print magazine, *Oncologistics*, with circulation to 8,000 leading oncologists and health care professionals. Oversaw editorial content, advertising, theme concept, layout, and final distribution to subscriber mailing list. Authored and bylined numerous articles for *Oncologistics* magazine as well as other industry publications.

- Increased bottom line profit margin by 450%, from \$40,000 in Q2 2007 to \$180,000+ in Q3 2007, in first quarter as Managing Editor of *Oncologistics* magazine.
- Drove internal and external brand messaging during 2 major company transitions, including brand and logo redesign and incorporation into overall corporate-wide brand for parent company, AmerisourceBergen Corporation, and company relocation from Maryland to Texas.
- Spearheaded internal associate newsletter to bridge communications with field staff comprising 60% of employees; internal survey confirmed bi-monthly newsletter improved morale and appreciation of cross-company disciplines.
- Initiated more clinical appearance and content of *Oncologistics* magazine; improvements increased advertising dollars from pharmaceutical manufacturing partners and improved end-user satisfaction.

LEVIN GROUP, Owings Mills, MD • 2004-2006

Provider of dental consulting and practice management solutions to dental practitioners and dental education institutions.

Professional Relations Manager

Directed external and internal communications and public relations, including podium acquisition and outreach for CEO and lead executives. Developed and drove marketing goals and messages, branding guidelines, media lists, press release schedules, and speaker bureau placements; managed team of 3 in implementation of marketing plan. Served as publicist and media advisor to CEO/Founder.

- Delivered media placement results of 212.35% of goal, totaling 42,670,684 readership impressions, for CEO and executive team articles, in 2005.
- Garnered prestigious placement of CEO as Chair of the Board of Visitors for the National Museum of Dentistry.
- Instituted Speaker's Bureau with specialty designations, comprised of CEO, top executives, and sales directors, to expand and capture podium engagements.
- Developed comprehensive media kit identifying each major service area, company's mission and history, and testimonials from leading clients and partners.
- Introduced formal marketing plan to address key business areas, growth objectives, and measurement tools; created 68-page comprehensive plan identifying audiences, business areas/segmentation, timelines, new initiatives, objectives, media lists, target industry meetings, revenue goals, specific action items, and keys to success.

ADVERTISING.COM, Baltimore, MD • 2004

Provider of Web-based interactive marketing services, including real-time behavioral segmentation designed to increase online advertisers' ROI; reach, demographic, and behavioral targeting tools to maximize advertisers' brand impact online; and online advertising optimization solutions.

Senior Manager, Public Relations

Managed team of 3 in execution of all public relations functions, including media relations, analyst relations, and podiums for key executives.

- Led PR function during company's IPO and acquisition by America Online.
- Garnered 993 editorial placements from January-September 2004 and averaged 141.86 news articles per month, up from 9 in January, in publications including *AdWeek*, *Media Week*, *The New York Post*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Advertising Age*, *Crain's New York Business*, *Washington Post*, *Business Week*, *MSNBC*, *eCommerce Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *World Magazine*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, and *Computer Weekly*.

ENTERPRISE PUBLIC RELATIONS, Frederick, MD • 2003-2004

Boutique public relations firm providing international public relations services for emerging companies.

Partner / Director

Co-founded company; drove successful start-up and new business acquisition. Managed clients in anti-money laundering, anti-theft, and anti-terrorist solutions; and professional services for office management and HR community.

- Generated firm's first 3 clients, with average contracts of \$90,000.
- Accepted invitation to address Public Relations Student Society of America on public relations as career choice.

DEMAREE PUBLIC RELATIONS, Germantown, MD • 2000-2002

Public relations firm providing services for hi-tech companies.

Senior Account Manager

Developed and directed public relations initiatives, new product launches, and market positioning for clients in diverse industries. Managed firm's largest account.

- Accounted for 60% of firm's revenue in 2002.
- Catapulted ocean shipping and logistics client's position in industry from #3 to #1.
- Secured feature article in *e-doc* magazine, leading European publication, and acquisition of several key clients, as result of successful launch of solution to manage new and emerging regulatory submissions for life sciences industry.
- Generated accolades from leading industry analysts following well-publicized launch of secure Java-based distributed computing technology to harness spare computing technology across the Internet.
- Developed P/L spreadsheet to project and record revenues vs. expenses for present and future business activities; enabled improved evaluation of client opportunities, revenue allocation, and employee pay scales.

Other Experience:

BLUE MOON BIG BAND, Taneytown, MD • 1998 to Present

U.S. East Coast Regional 1940s style swing orchestra, specializing in the timeless sounds of the American Big Band Era.

Owner/Founder/Band Leader

All business development, communications, and marketing functions.

- Design and maintenance of website, including all content and collateral.

- Design and distribution of monthly client-facing communications.
- Online media (posting of vides to YouTube channel and Facebook page; Twitter updates).

Additional Professional Experience:

Agency Development & Training Specialist at STATE FARM INSURANCE COMPANY.

Senior Sales & Product Manager at AGENCY SERVICES, INC.

Sales Manager at NIPPONDENSO OF LOS ANGELES.

Account Sales Representative at TIMES PUBLISHING GROUP.

Community Service:

Volunteer

GERSTELL ACADEMY, Finksburg, MD • 2008 to Present

- Admissions • 2011-2012
- Class Parent • 2010-2011
- Gerstell Academy Parents Association • 2008-Present

Publications:

Scholar Practitioner

WALDEN UNIVERSITY, Minneapolis, MN • 2008-Present

- Principles of Organizational and Social Systems • 2011 (99 pages)
- Principles of Societal Development • 2008 (113 pages)

Lead or Bylined Author

Oncologistics Magazine • 2006

- Industry Insight: An Interview With Deborah Dunsire, M.D., President & Chief Executive of Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (drug discovery in health care).

HR.com • 2003

- Military Mobilizations May Mean Active Duty At Home for Employees (human resources).

Cargo & Trade Magazine • 2002

- Smooth Sailing With An Effective ROI Model? (ocean transportation supply chain).
Cargo & Trade Magazine • 2002
- A Sea Change In The Ocean Transportation Industry (ocean transportation supply chain).
e-doc Magazine • 2001
- Managing Electronic Submissions (document technologies for health care).

Editor

PowerWriters • 2011

- Book authored by Al Betz (for the court reporting industry).

Honors and Awards:

Fine Arts Award

LOYOLA COLLEGE, Baltimore, MD • 1987

Professional Affiliations:

Member

AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION, New York, NY • 2008 to Present