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## Exploring followership in hospitality and tourism education

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### 1. Introduction

Leadership has been the focus of much study, but the consideration of the concepts involved in following leaders, or in what has been termed followership, is relatively rare (e.g. [Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, & Morris, 2006](#); [Brum & Drury, 2013](#); [Testa, 2000](#)). Furthermore, it is even more uncommon as the subject of studies in the field of hospitality and tourism. However, in spite of this lack of attention, followership is viewed as essential to the management and organization of groups. Moreover, it is critical at all levels of an organization, especially with respect to the relationships between employers and employees ([Bjugstad et al., 2006](#)).

The term followership may be defined as the practices that occur and evolve between leaders and followers, allowing followers to function with leaders to achieve shared goals while demonstrating teamwork and building interconnections ([Colangelo, 2000](#); [Kelley, 2004](#)). Additionally, while followership is significant in all kinds of organizations and operations, it is particularly important in hospitality and tourism organizations and operations. In the hospitality and tourism industry, service is vital to success and groups of employees must work effectively together to make and serve food, provide lodging operations around the clock, and plan and conduct events in a well-timed, suitable manner. Knowing more about what stakeholders in hospitality and tourism education believe about followership would be useful for instructors and students, for arguably being an effective follower is important in one's career in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Therefore, this study explored followership in the discipline of hospitality and tourism. The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn more about what hospitality and tourism students, educators, and industry professionals think about followership by investigating their personal views of followership in the field of hospitality and tourism, with the goal of guiding further research and education in this area.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. The framework of followership

An uncomplicated definition of leadership, arguably the framework of followership, suggested by [Van Vugt \(2009\)](#) proposes that leadership is “a process of influence to attain mutual goals” (pg. 355). This all-purpose definition of leadership is built upon the work of others (e.g. [Bass & Stogdill, 1990](#); [Hollander, 1985](#)).

As far as the concepts encompassing leadership, a number of theories exist. Over 50 years ago, scholars put forward the trait theory of leadership ([Lundin & Lancaster, 1990](#); [Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009](#)), although today leadership is more commonly seen as a process. Even after much attention was given to the trait theory, no single trait or set of traits was shown to truly to describe leaders, and behavioral and situational leadership theories began to develop (e.g. [Heifetz, 2007](#); [Kouzes & Posner, 2006](#)). There are numerous specific theories related to leadership, yet they do not necessarily address followership directly. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

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### 2.1.1. Transactional versus transformational leadership

The transactional versus transformational interpretation of leadership has been researched by numerous scholars (e.g. [Aldoory & Toth, 2004](#); [Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003](#); [Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999](#); [Bass & Avolio, 1997](#); [Bass & Avolio, 1994, 1995](#); [Hopton, 2014](#); [Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996](#)). Transformational leaders focus on tasks and outcomes. This type of leadership centers on an organization's current goals and expectations through supervision and the use of incentives and penalties. Followers are expected to concentrate on compliance with those objectives as well ([Bass & Avolio, 1997](#)). Conversely, transformational leaders focus on leading by example, so as to help followers see the leader's vision and goals. This style of leadership also connects with followers' strengths and weaknesses and on ways to improve their capabilities ([Bass & Avolio, 1997](#)). While followers are an important component of this leadership paradigm, they are not the focal point.

### 2.1.2. Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory

This theory concentrates on the didactic relationship between leaders and followers (e.g. [Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975](#); [Gerstner & Day, 1997](#); [Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999](#); [Graen & Scandura, 1987](#)). The uniqueness of this theory is that the relationship is the unit of analysis ([Gerstner & Day, 1997](#)) and thus, it does not focus primarily on followers.

### 2.1.3. Servant leadership

This theory of leadership proposes that a leader is inspired by service itself through a desire to serve and encourage followers (e.g. [Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006](#); [Dixon, Mercado, & Knowles, 2013](#); [Greenleaf, 1977](#); [Russell & Stone, 2002](#)). Although followers are considered, the focus of this theory is on the leader as servant ([Greenleaf, 1977](#)).

All of these views of leadership may offer concepts that are useful to managers, owners, and employees of businesses and other organizations. These theories may help them to comprehend their communication and activities as they work together to accomplish goals.

Yet, even though the current attention is on the leadership process instead of the trait approach, a number of scholars believe that people neglect to remember that leaders do not exist unless they have followers (e.g. [Kang, Heo, & Kim, 2015](#); [Kellerman, 2008](#); [Kelley, 2004](#)). Moreover, although individuals may be able to identify their own leadership style, they frequently do not understand their followership style ([Colangelo, 2000](#)). Understanding one's own style and behaviors regarding followership can be useful for performing in the workplace and the community throughout one's career and personal life.

## 2.2. Scholarship on followership

In comparison to leadership, followership has not been much of a focus in the literature. Followership has been explored by a limited number of scholars over the past 20 years or so (e.g. [Chaleff, 1995, 2008](#); [Hersey & Blanchard, 1988](#); [Kellerman, 2012](#); [Kelley, 1988, 2004](#)); but exactly what is followership? An uncomplicated, pragmatic definition of followership, suggested by [Baker and Denis \(2011\)](#), proposes that "a follower is defined as an active, participative role in which a person willingly supports the teachings or views of a leader and consciously and deliberately works towards goals held in common with the leader and/or organization" (pg. 342). A number of researchers also suggest that followership is an experiential requisite of leadership and is necessary for effective leadership (e.g. [Agho, 2009](#); [Rost, 2008](#)). In fact, followership has been called "upward leadership" by some scholars (e.g. [Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010](#)).

Additional researchers (e.g. [Chaleff, 1995, 2003, 2008](#); [Hersey & Blanchard, 1988](#); [Kang et al., 2015](#); [Kellerman, 2008](#)) have strived to provide thoughtful approaches toward understanding followership. For example, [Chaleff \(1995, 2008\)](#) proposes that influential followers encourage influential leaders with limited use of the chain of command. Meanwhile, [Hersey and Blanchard \(1988\)](#) argues that people need to reflect on an all-encompassing interpretation of the leadership and followership process. [Kellerman \(2012\)](#) further proposes that followership is a sense of shared interaction among subordinates and superiors. Additionally, [Chaleff \(1995, 2003\)](#) and [Kellerman \(2012\)](#) maintain that the behaviors of followers are critical to the accomplishments of leaders. In terms of specific qualities of followership, [Chaleff \(1995, 2003\)](#) characterizes them as the courage to assume responsibility, the courage to serve, the courage to challenge, the courage to participate in personal and organizational transformation, and the courage to take moral action. The five qualities have impacts on organizations from the perspectives of both employees and managers and have the capacity to enhance their varied work-related activities.

Both leadership and followership can be essential to the management of hospitality and tourism businesses and organizations. For that reason, perhaps the tenets of followership ought to be recognized by hospitality and tourism instructors, students, and industry practitioners. As an innovator in the study of followership, [Kelley \(2004\)](#) observed that leaders usually offer no more than 20 percent to the accomplishments of most business or non-profit entities. The other 80 percent of the success in an organization relied on followers. For instance, the majority of employees, despite their actual position, expended more hours and effort as followers than as leaders ([Kelley, 2004](#)). Almost two decades after [Kelley \(2004\)](#) explored followership, [Blanchard, Welbourne, Gilmore, and Bullock \(2009\)](#) tried to validate his scale (1992) and discovered that independent critical thinking and active engagement occupied primary places in the work lives of employees. Therefore, given the large amount of time that students will devote to being employees, as both followers and potentially as leaders, it may be useful to study followership as well as leadership in undergraduate programs.

As noted by several scholars, the concept of followership differs by culture and other factors (e.g. [Kellerman, 2008](#); [Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2009](#); [Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001](#); [Merriti & Helmreich, 1996](#)). Recognizing and comprehending differences in cross-cultural leadership and followership practices are important given the multicultural world today, but research on these topics is limited. Additionally, according to some researchers, followership may differ according to demographic and other variables (e.g.

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