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Searching for the successful hospitality follower. A case study in Followership

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Abstract

This paper adopts a qualitative approach to identify and analyse the meaning of followership in the hospitality industry. Interviews, utilising a semi structured questionnaire, will be undertaken to examine how followers in the New Zealand hospitality industry construct their roles as followers. The findings of this paper will contribute to the understanding of followership in the hospitality industry. Indications will be provided to hospitality leaders as well as educators in the field to assist in facilitating their training programs in hospitality management and leadership.

Keywords: Followership, hospitality, case study, followers

As pointed out by Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009), there is an omission in both theory and research on followership in leadership studies. Albeit followership has been recognised to affect both the effectiveness of leadership and organisation outcomes of interest (Hollander, 1992; Follett, 1949), a follower-centred approach to analyse leadership is still to be explored (Baker, 2007).

Current literature on followership can be divided into two categories: Follower centred leadership studies and Followership. The first category adopts a follower centred approach to study leadership. Meindl (1995) initiated a framework to study followers' traits, emotions, attitudes, and their perceptions of the effectiveness and preference of leadership as individuals or in groups. The framework has been explored and tested by many researchers to conclude typologies of followership and its influence on leadership.
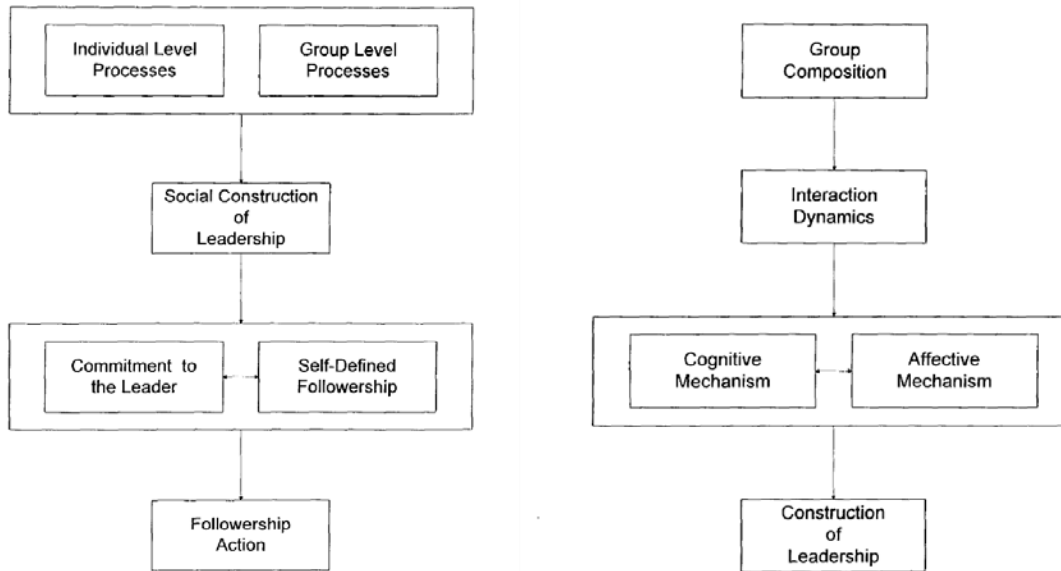
Figure 1.0 Meindl's general model and group model of follower-centred approach in leadership.

Schyns and Felfe (2006) discovered that extroversive personality in followers makes transformational leadership more desirable and Dvir and Shamir (2003) found self efficacy and motivation in followers made transformational leadership more effective than other types of leadership. Pastor, Mayo, and Shamir (2007) identified that the followers with a higher arousal give a higher rating of charismatic leadership. Despite of the follower centred framework, the current research still have a leadership focus or a focus on the relationship between followership and leadership. Conclusion from these follower-centred researches provides an expanded view of leadership by integrating followers into leadership theories.

The second category has a focus on the construction of the followership instead of analysing and consolidating leadership theories from the perspective of followers. As suggested by Uhl-Bien and Pillai (2007), the current research on followership, especially the research following the framework designed by Meintl in 1995, still focuses on the constructions of leadership while followership in a social construction model is needed to augment the understanding of followership as a different concept or schema from leadership. Carsen et al (2007) examined the social construction of followership and discovered disparate themes across different groups of followers. In comparison to Bresnen's findings (1995) of multiplicity of meaning on social constructions of leadership, Carsten et all (2007) discussed similar findings on followership which indicates that different workplaces, contextual variables of leadership, and climate will all influence the social constructions of followership.

Given the influence of workplace and social climate it is important to examine followership in the specific context of hospitality. As a service industry there is an enormous dependence on staff, in fact the staff are the brand and the business to the guests (Cai & Hobson, 2004). To successfully deliver on the brand promise and meet guest expectations there is a need for consistency of service from all staff which requires a commitment to the organisation and its values (Cai &

Hobson, 2004; Presbury, Fitzgerald, & Chapman, 2005). In an industry that has an issue with staff turnover (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Presbury, et al., 2005) and developing leaders from within (Walsh & Taylor, 2007) it is critical to understand how staff view their roles as followers. The rising expectations of guests and resultant need for empowered staff (Kazlauskaite, Buciuniene, & Turauskas, 2006; Presbury, et al., 2005) also comes into play as their view of their role affects staff willingness to accept empowerment (Gill, Fitzgerald, Bhutani, Mand, & Sharma, 2010).

Despite these suggestions and research, we still lack empirical data to either define followership roles under different cultural context or analyse followership as a separate theory from leadership. This project will interview randomly selected 30 people who are currently working in hospitality industry in New Zealand and currently taking no leader roles. Semi structured questionnaire is designed to analyse followers' self perceived roles as followers with the follower three objectives:

- What are the self-perceived roles as subordinates

- Benefits and drawbacks being followers

- What personal qualities and behaviours make successful followership

NVivo9.0 will be used for coding the interview scripts. Themes will then be formed to define and analyse followership specifically in Hospitality New Zealand. Findings from the research will help understand and define followership in hospitality industry and indications will be provided to hospitality human resources, hospitality educators, and all the leaders in hospitality industry.

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