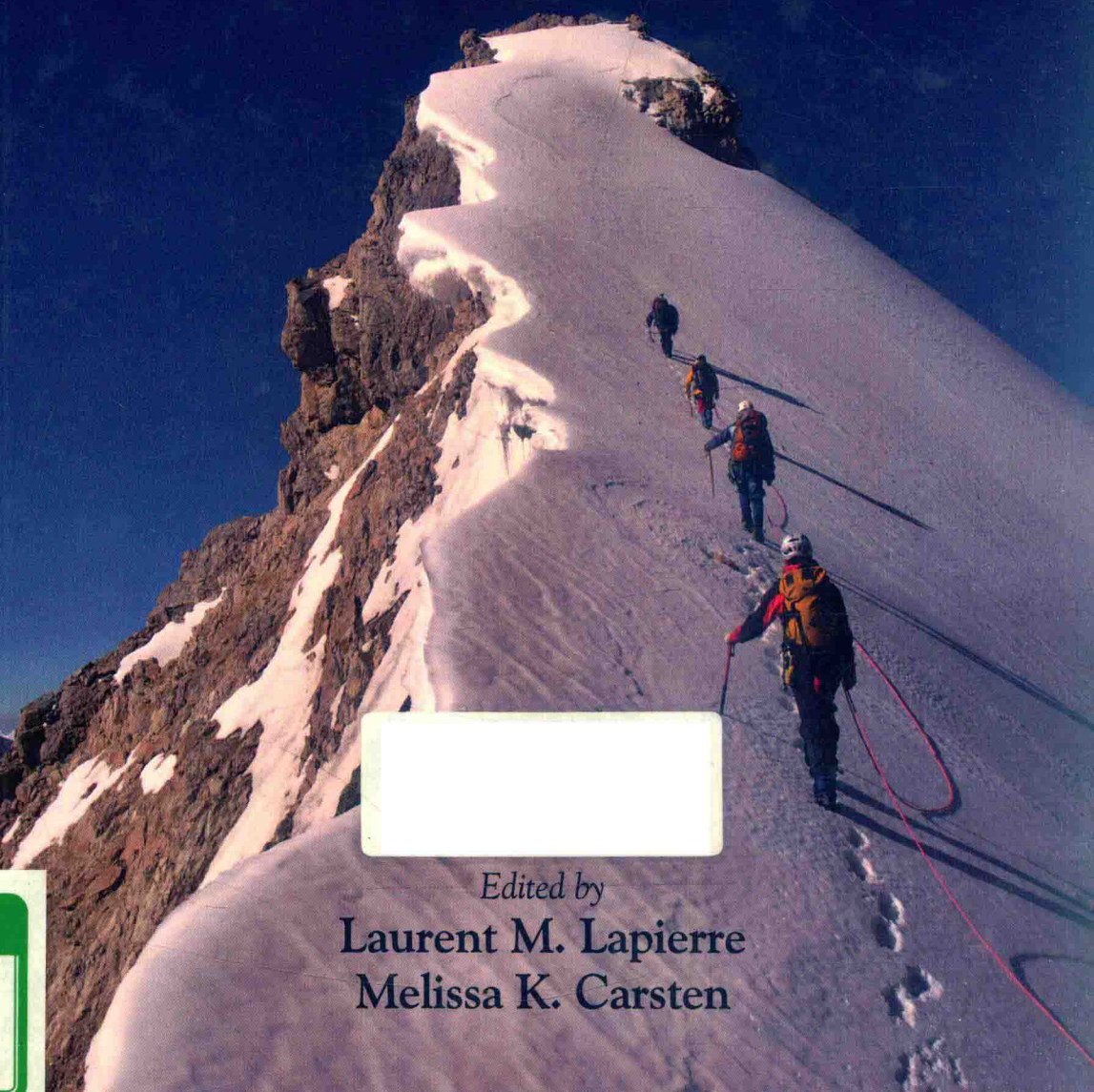




# Followership

*What is it and why do people follow?*



*Edited by*  
**Laurent M. Lapierre**  
**Melissa K. Carsten**

# **FOLLOWERSHIP: WHAT IS IT AND WHY DO PEOPLE FOLLOW?**

**EDITED BY**

**LAURENT M. LAPIERRE**

*Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa, Canada*

**MELISSA K. CARSTEN**

*College of Business Administration, Winthrop University, USA*



United Kingdom • North America • Japan  
India • Malaysia • China

Emerald Group Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2014

Copyright © 2014 Emerald Group Publishing Limited

**Reprints and permission service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78350-515-9



ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# **FOLLOWERSHIP: WHAT IS IT AND WHY DO PEOPLE FOLLOW?**

## List of Contributors

<i>Susan D. Baker</i>	Earl G. Graves School of Business and Management, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, USA
<i>Michelle C. Bligh</i>	Drucker-Ito Graduate School of Management, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, USA
<i>Melissa K. Carsten</i>	College of Business Administration, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC, USA
<i>Deanna de Zilwa</i>	School of Management and Governance, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia, Australia
<i>Peter Harms</i>	College of Business Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA
<i>Andrew T. Hinrichs</i>	Department of Management, Operations, and Marketing, California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, CA, USA
<i>Kim T. Hinrichs</i>	Department of Management, College of Business, California State University, Chico, Chico, CA, USA
<i>Kimberly S. Jaussi</i>	School of Management, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY, USA
<i>Laurent M. Lapierre</i>	Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada
<i>Christopher J. Mathis</i>	Earl G. Graves School of Business and Management, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, USA
<i>Tara McCoy</i>	Department of Psychology, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

**viii** *List of Contributors*

<i>Micha Popper</i>	Department of Psychology, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel
<i>Amy E. Randel</i>	Department of Management, College of Business Administration, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA
<i>Rhonda K. Rodgers</i>	Division of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, USA
<i>William E. Rosenbach</i>	Rosenbach & Associates, Inc., Gettysburg, PA, USA
<i>Susan A. Stites-Doe</i>	College at Brockport, State University of New York, Brockport, NY, USA
<i>Thomas Sy</i>	Department of Psychology, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA
<i>Mary Uhl-Bien</i>	College of Business Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA

## Introduction and Book Overview

There is a growing consensus in the leadership literature that the study of followers and followership has been severely underrepresented (Baker, 2007; Bligh, 2011; Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010; Collinson, 2006; Sy, 2010; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Leadership theory and practice have traditionally favored the “leader” in discussions of how leadership can advance organizational objectives (Hollander, 2008). For over a century, scholars have sought to understand the personal characteristics and behaviors of leaders, how they influence and inspire followers, and how their vision of the future may advance positive change in organizations (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). In this effort, followers have been viewed as “recipients or moderators of the leader’s influence, and as vehicles for the actualization of the leader’s vision, mission, or goals” (Shamir, 2007, p. x). Indeed, followers are traditionally seen as those who concede to the leader’s directives, and very few scholars have ventured to examine how followers might serve as partners, co-contributors, or active participants in the leadership process (Hollander, 1992, 1993). Yet, we know that leadership is a process of mutual influence (Greene, 1975; Sims & Manz, 1984), where leaders and followers work together to advance common objectives (Rost, 1991). As noted by Shamir (2007, p. xix), “leadership emerges in the interactions between leaders and followers.” Thus, without followers, leadership would not materialize and the benefits of leadership would not be realized by the organization. Followers are an essential part of the leadership equation, and there is a pervasive need to better understand who followers are, how they define and enact their role, and the ways in which followers may impact leaders and the leadership process.

The purpose of this book is to bring followers to the forefront of the leadership process, by examining who the followers are, and how and why they follow. Rather than treating followers as a byproduct of leadership, our book sheds light on the unique characteristics of followers, and what followers do to impact leadership and organizational outcomes. For example, given that followers and followership is a newly emerging field of study, there are many questions that must be answered and a strong need for theoretical foundations that will guide research and practice in this area. Our book explores emerging paradigms of followership and helps to answer the questions: “What is followership” and “Why do people follow.” Addressing these questions will help researchers, practitioners, and educators better understand what it means to be a follower, and highlights the importance of

understanding followers as individuals with unique characteristics, styles, and perceptions that distinctively impact leaders and the leadership process.

## Overview of Chapters

The first part of our book seeks to define what followership is. In this section, our contributors explore how the enactment of followership has been defined throughout history, and provide new conceptualizations of followership, including authentic followership, fluid followership, and followership without dependence on a leader. These followership paradigms recast followers from those who silently observe and obey leaders to those who work in partnership with leaders to influence organizational goals.

Chapter 1, written by Melissa K. Carsten, Peter Harms, and Mary Uhl-Bien, explores historical accounts of followership and examines the negative connotation that has been associated with the word “follower.” The authors draw from evolutionary, sociological, and psychological sciences to examine how followership has been defined in the past, and how historical definitions have inadvertently produced a negative association with the word “follower.” This chapter also reviews several notable examples of nonfollowership throughout history, and challenges the traditional view that all followers are blindly obedient and passive. The chapter concludes with a focus on how to redefine “followership” for the Management literature and why organizations are more reliant on followers now than in the past. The authors also present recommendations for how we can dilute the negative connotation associated with the word “follower” and recast the follower role in a more favorable and productive light.

Chapter 2, written by Rhonda K. Rodgers and Michelle C. Bligh, draws from work on Authentic Leadership to present a new theoretical perspective on Authentic Followers — Individuals who maintain an internalized moral perspective, heightened levels of self-awareness and self-regulation, and are capable of developing an authentic relationship with the leader. The chapter explores characteristics of authentic followers, how leader and follower roles are fluid and interchangeable, and how authenticity is required by both leaders and followers to advance organizational objectives. In addition, the authors discuss how authentic followers enact their role, and the positive effects that such followers can have on leaders and organizations.

Chapter 3, written by Deanna de Zilwa, also addresses authentic followership by proposing a new conceptual framework for defining and studying authentic followers. de Zilwa defines authentic followership as a style of followership that involves truth, integrity, identity with the organization, and a willingness to serve the interests of the organization over those of the individual follower. This new framework is comprised of three sets of components: The first component refers to individual attributes of followers, the second relates to interactions between followers, leaders and the firm, and the third relates to the context required for authentic followership to flourish in organizations. The chapter also discusses how



authentic followership is expected to benefit both the leader and the organization, and identifies the boundaries of the conceptual framework. In addition, this chapter discusses under what conditions, or in which types of firms, authentic followership would not be feasible, relevant, or useful.

Chapter 4, written by Susan D. Baker, Susan A. Stites-Doe, Christopher J. Mathis, and William E. Rosenbach, explores how variations in follower behavior contribute to the leader–follower relationship in organizations. Specifically, they apply Rosenbach, Pittman, and Potter III's (1996) model of followership to examine how certain behaviors influence a follower's ability to perform tasks and build relationships. In each section, the authors provide propositions that can be used to guide future research on follower behavior, and to better understand how follower behavior influences the relationship between leaders and followers, as well as the follower's likelihood of emerging as a leader.

Chapter 5, written by Kim T. Hinrichs and Andrew T. Hinrichs, examines the concept of followership as it relates to hierarchical positions in organizations. The authors contend that followership is different from subordination, and that deference to a leader (i.e., followership) may occur either within or outside of hierarchical relationships. Within hierarchical structures, followership typically is defined by a lack of power, status, and authority that can put followers in a “one-down” position. This position is thought to erode follower dignity and put a strain on followers' well-being. The authors discuss the effects of hierarchical structures on followers and provide recommendations for how followers can be defined and studied in organizations.

The second part of the book explores the question: “why do people follow?” In this section, our contributors describe various factors explaining why people follow a leader, including factors rooted in traditional psychological literatures (e.g., psychoanalytic, social psychological), those predicting individuals' inclination or capacity to switch between follower and leader roles, those relating to specific organizational practices, and finally those stemming from subordinates' motivation to best support their manager's leadership decision-making.

Chapter 6, written by Micha Popper, addresses the reasons why followers need leaders, and the origins of followership from psychoanalytic, cognitive, and social psychological approaches. The author explores reasons why human beings “follow” leaders and the benefits that are reaped by submitting to the intellect, identity, and teachings of others. The chapter concludes with directions for future research that explores followership in organizations, and the importance of factors such as context, leader–follower distance, and psychological heuristics in determining why people follow leaders.

Chapter 7, written by Thomas Sy and Tara McCoy, addresses the notion that individuals vary in their propensity to switch between follower and leader roles. This intra-personal process, which the authors label as “leader–follower switching” (LFS), is thought to manifest itself in four different LFS styles, which differ in the degree of enactment of each role. The chapter concludes by providing a research agenda for investigating the measurement of LFS, as well as its antecedents and outcomes.

Chapter 8, contributed by Kimberly S. Jaussi and Amy E. Randel, suggests practices that organizations can use to develop employees into the most “effective” type of followers, as conceptualized in Kelley’s (1988) seminal follower typology. The authors build upon the transformational model of leadership to present specific ways with which leaders can develop the identity and behaviors of effective followers.

Finally, Chapter 9, written by Laurent M. Lapierre, begins by explaining why subordinates should follow their manager. Lapierre then addresses salient contextual factors that employees may use as cues for deciding which style of followership would best support their manager’s leadership. Specifically, to the extent that a subordinate wishes to support the manager’s leadership decision-making, the author argues that the subordinate should consider specific situational factors when determining whether proactive followership (i.e., getting involved in the leadership decision-making process) or passive followership (i.e., accepting the leader’s decision without question) would be of most value. Four situational factors are addressed, including (1) the subordinate’s expertise, (2) the manager’s display of trust in the subordinate, (3) the urgency with which the leadership decision must be made, and (4) whether the leadership decision, once made, can realistically be changed.

The chapters outlined above exemplify, for both researchers and practitioners, the importance of understanding the important role that followers play in the leadership process. These chapters offer a strong foundation on which followership theory can be built and investigated. Although there continues to be a strong need to develop a better understanding of what followership is and why people follow, this book presents an important introduction to the importance of followers and the need for further exploration of followership in organizations.

## References

- Baker, S. D. (2007). Followership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 14(1), 50–60.
- Bligh, M. C. (2011). Followership and follower-centred approaches. In A. Bryman, K. Grint, B. Jackson, M. Uhl-Bien, & D. Collinson (Eds.), *The sage handbook of Leadership* (pp. 1180–1216). London, UK: Sage.
- Carsten, M. K., Uhl-Bien, M., West, B. J., Patera, J. L., & McGregor, R. (2010). Exploring social constructions of followership: A qualitative study. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(3), 543–562.
- Collinson, D. (2006). Rethinking followership: A post-structuralist analysis of follower identities. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(2), 179–189.
- Greene, C. N. (1975). The reciprocal nature of influence between leader and subordinate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(2), 187–193.
- Hollander, E. P. (1992). Leadership, followership, self, and others. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 3(1), 43–54.
- Hollander, E. P. (1993). Legitimacy, power, and influence: A perspective on relational features of leadership. In M. M. Chemers & A. Roy (Eds.), *Leadership theory and practice: Perspectives and directions*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

- Hollander, E. P. (2008). On the central role of leadership processes. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 35(1), 39–52.
- Kelley, R. E. (1988). In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review*, 66(6), 141–148.
- Rosenbach, W. E., Pittman, T. S., & Potter III, E. H. (2012). What makes a follower? In W. E. Rosenbach, R. L. Taylor & M. A. Youndt (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in leadership* (7th ed., pp. 77–87). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Rost, J. C. (1991). *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. London, UK: Praeger.
- Shamir, B. (2007). From passive recipients to active co-producers: Followers' roles in the leadership process. In B. Shamir, R. Pillai, M. C. Bligh, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *Follower-centered perspectives on leadership. A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl* (pp. ix–xxxix). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Sims, H. P., & Manz, C. C. (1984). Observing leader behavior: Toward reciprocal determinism in leadership theory. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(2), 222–232.
- Sy, T. (2010). What do you think of followers? Examining the content, structure, and consequences of implicit followership theories. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 113(2), 73–84.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Riggio, R. E., Lowe, K. B., & Carsten, M. K. (2014). Followership theory: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(1), 83–104.
- Yukl, G., & Van Fleet, D. D. (1992). Theory and research on leadership in organizations. In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 147–197). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

# Contents

List of Contributors	vii
Introduction and Book Overview	ix

## PART 1: WHAT IS FOLLOWERSHIP?

1. Exploring Historical Perspectives of Followership: The Need for an Expanded View of Followers and the Follower Role <i>Melissa K. Carsten, Peter Harms and Mary Uhl-Bien</i>	3
2. Exploring the “Flip Side” of the Coin: Do Authentic Leaders Need Authentic Followers? <i>Rhonda K. Rodgers and Michelle C. Bligh</i>	27
3. A New Conceptual Framework for Authentic Followership <i>Deanna de Zilwa</i>	47
4. The Fluid Nature of Follower and Leader Roles <i>Susan D. Baker, Susan A. Stites-Doe, Christopher J. Mathis and William E. Rosenbach</i>	73
5. Comparing Followers and Subordinates: Accounting for the Effects of Organizational Hierarchy <i>Kim T. Hinrichs and Andrew T. Hinrichs</i>	89

## PART 2: WHY DO PEOPLE FOLLOW?

6. Why Do People Follow? <i>Micha Popper</i>	109
---	-----

7. Being Both Leaders and Followers: Advancing a Model of Leader and Follower Role Switching <i>Thomas Sy and Tara McCoy</i>	121
8. Leading to Develop Truly Effective Followers <i>Kimberly S. Jaussi and Amy E. Randel</i>	141
9. Why and How <i>Should</i> Subordinates Follow Their Managers? <i>Laurent M. Lapierre</i>	157
About the Editors	171
About the Authors	173

## **PART 1: WHAT IS FOLLOWERSHIP?**



## Chapter 1

# Exploring Historical Perspectives of Followership: The Need for an Expanded View of Followers and the Follower Role

Melissa K. Carsten, Peter Harms and Mary Uhl-Bien

### Abstract

*Purpose* – The purpose of this chapter is to explore historical perspectives on the meaning of followership and to advance a more modern view of organizational followership and the importance of the follower role.

*Design/methodology/approach* – This chapter reviews anthropological, sociological, and psychological perspectives on the meaning of followership to understand how followership has been conceptualized in the past. We then review literature about organizational followership and examine the various role orientations that followers may adopt while working with leaders.

*Findings* – Our literature review suggests that followers are historically portrayed as either blindly and passively obedient, or defiant and insubordinate. Current literature on followership helps to broaden these early definitions by demonstrating that followers may also be proactive partners in the leadership process, and that these proactive forms of followership may advance organizational objectives.

*Practical implications* – The literature on followership provides best practices that organizations can adopt to cultivate proactive, engaged followers who work in concert with leaders to advance the mission of the organization. Our review highlights the important characteristics and behaviors of followers that help to achieve this goal.

*Originality/value* – Followership is an emerging field and there is much more that needs to be understood about who followers are, how they perceive their



role in the leadership process, and the ways that they advance both leadership and organizational objectives.

*Keywords:* Follower; followership; follower-centered; leadership; role orientation

In almost 150 years of leadership research, few scholars have attempted to really define and understand the concept of followership (Bligh, 2011; Collinson, 2006; Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). This is not to say that followers have not been mentioned in leadership research. To the contrary, most writings about leadership have discussed followers in terms of what leaders can do to influence, inspire, and direct followers to a desired future goal (Yukl, 2010; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). In the leadership literature, however, followers have remained undefined, with very few researchers spending time or energy explaining who followers are or how they work with leaders to advance common objectives (Collinson, 2006; Hollander, 1993).

One might even say that the concept of followership has gained a negative connotation as followers are often considered to be individuals who lack the capability to lead (Hoption, Christie, & Barling, 2012). This negative connotation is found in common quotes or sayings such as “Never Follow.” The negativity surrounding the word follower has been amplified by troubling examples of blind, unthinking followers engaging in disturbing behaviors because they were told to do so by their leaders (i.e., Nazi Germany, The Peoples Temple). But we know that despite the fact that many followers do indeed follow in a blindly obedient manner (see Blass, 2009 for a review), there are just many others who engage with leaders in a constructive way to advance the objectives and goals of the group (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010). Indeed, in today’s fast paced and increasingly competitive business environment, the role of followers is becoming more important than ever as leaders depend on followers to offer insight, ideas, new strategies, or to challenge the status quo (Bennis, 2000; Latour & Rast, 2004).

In this chapter, we argue that the time come for us to reconsider what we mean when we say “followership.” What is implied by the quote above, and echoed by many other scholars, is that not all followers “follow” in the traditional sense of the term (Chaleff, 1995; Dvir & Shamir, 2003; Kelley, 1992; Shamir, 2007). Yet history holds centuries of examples not only of blindly passive followers but also of followers who courageously question leaders and challenge the status quo. Despite this, the view that followers are weak, gullible, and desperate for leadership is still endorsed (Sy, 2010). These views originated in evolutionary perspectives of leadership and followership, and were reinforced in major theoretical perspectives on leadership and followership from sociology and psychology. They now pervade the leadership literature to the detriment of scholarship and practice. The result is an incomplete view of leadership and a widespread misunderstanding of the role of followers and followership in the leadership process.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the source of this misunderstanding by providing a historical perspective on the development of followership perceptions