


One Continuous Side: Rethinking Followership with the Möbius Strip

Facilitated by Drs. Eric Kaufman & Austin Council



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Too Much Leadership

- “Romance” of leadership: everything is dependent upon the leader (e.g., causes of success & failure); psychological need to make sense of complex phenomena (Bligh & Schyns, 2007; Cain, 2017).
- “Leadership Industry” overemphasizes “leaders” (Kellerman, 2012).
- Glorification of “leadership skills” attracts individuals motivated by the spotlight rather than service (e.g., being in charge vs. contributing towards a problem/issue (Cain, 2017).
- Higher education tends to overemphasize leadership due in part because they’re trying to prepare students for the corporate world, assuming that leadership is what businesses need, however, followership is gaining traction (Cain, 2017; Kelley, 1988).

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Got Followership? Rethinking Leadership from the Other Side

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Followership & Tango

EMBRACING THE DANCE

Weak followership is more restrictive for the leader.





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Followership & Tango

EMBRACING THE DANCE

Strong followership can help stabilize a leader that loses focus.

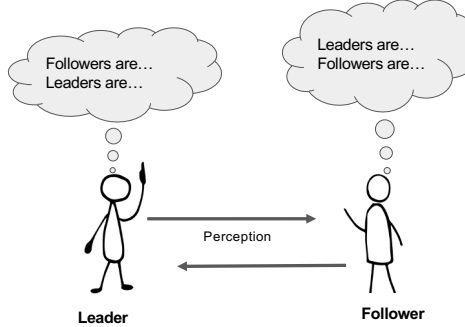




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Implicit Theories of Leadership & Followership

“Individuals have an internal working model or schema comprised of certain traits and characteristics that are typically associated with the word ‘leader’ and ‘follower.’ (Foti et al., 2017, p. 264)



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LEADERSHIP IS HALF THE STORY

Leader/Follower Relationships

- Leadership success depends on flexibility and awareness in leader-to-follower transitions (Falls & Allen, 2020).
- “Leader and follower roles may be adopted flexibly by the same individual because in some cases it pays to be a leader and in others to be a follower” (Van Vugt et al., 2008, p. 186).
- Many individuals are faced with the challenge of “simultaneously filling the roles of leader and follower” (Greer, 2014, p. 156).
- “Leadership cannot be studied apart from followership” (Van Vugt et al., 2008, p. 193).

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WE ALL HAVE BLIND SPOTS

The bigger you are the bigger your blind-spots

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Followership Role Orientations

1. Passive: A “Subordinate” Role Enactment
2. Co-Production: A “Partner” Role Enactment
3. Anti-authoritarian: A “Non-follower” Role Enactment

Where do you stand?

[Image created with ChatGPT Edu]


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Surprise of the Möbius Strip

“Möbius strips are unique because of their one sidedness. Rather than having two sides and two edges, with a simple twist, a piece of paper has one side and one edge. Inner and outer become one” (Byrnes, 2012, p. 23).

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Life on the Möbius Strip




Backstage vs. Onstage

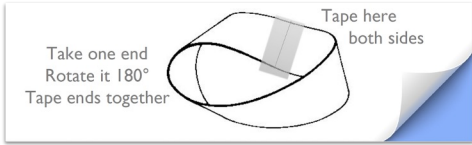

“I have to keep repeating, ‘what seems to be’ because there is no ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ on the Möbius strip—the two apparent sides keep co-creating each other.” (Palmer, 2004)

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Creating a Möbius Strip




1. Take a single strip of paper.
2. Write your first name and “leading” on one side.
3. Write your last name and “following” on the other side.
4. Twist the paper and tape the ends together.

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Practical Applications

- Many individuals are faced with the challenge of “simultaneously filling the roles of leader and follower” (Greer, 2014, p. 156).
- “Leader and follower roles may be adopted flexibly by the same individual because in some cases it pays to be a leader and in others to be a follower” (Van Vugt et al., 2008, p. 186).
- Leadership success depends on flexibility and awareness in leader-to-follower transitions (Falls & Allen, 2020).




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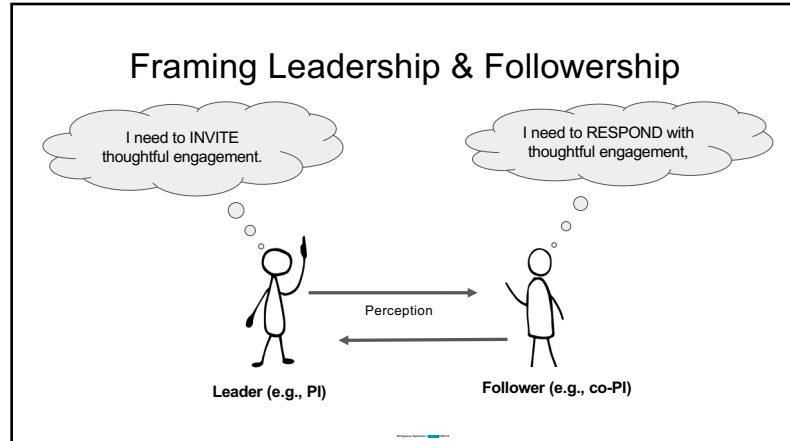
Contrasting with Fabre's Processionary Caterpillars

- Followed head-to-tail in a circle around the rim of a flower pot.
- Continued marching in the circle for a week, failing to identify the food source within reach.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pine_processionary


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Case Study Activity

- In your groups, please read the AmeriCorps case study quietly.
- After, each group will discuss a different question.
- At the end we will go around the room and hear from each group.




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<<10:00>>



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Relevance to Humility

- Do our historical, cultural or binary notions of leadership lead to leader-follower conflict?
- Framing the leader-follower relationship with the Möbius Strip suggests a sharing of work, elevating equality over power-dynamics.
- In order to make this shift, a removal of one's ego is required, which will enforce the sustainment of the group, individual, and the larger organizational or cultural context (i.e., humility definition). **Humility is a lens through which we can see the fluidity of the leader-follower relationship.**

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Humility Definition

- Tangney (2000):
 - Accurate assessment of one's abilities and achievements (not low self-esteem or self-depreciation).
 - Ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations.
 - Openness to new ideas, contradictory information, advice.
 - Keeping one's place in the world in perspective.
 - "forgetting of the self"; one is part of a larger universe.
 - Appreciation of the value of all things.
- Sowcik (2022) "Humility is a proper perspective of one's self, one's relationship with others, and one's connection with something bigger."

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Ongoing Questions

- In what ways can the Möbius strip help us reframe perspectives on power, including the simultaneous presence of leadership and followership within us all?
- How can we transform relationships in ways that better distribute authority and responsibility to reduce the strain on particular individuals?
- How might we help others abandon the false dichotomy that is often used to describe leader-follower roles?
- What role could the virtue of humility play in this process?



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The screenshot shows the 'Followship Studies Research Guide' page on the University Libraries website. The URL is <https://guides.lib.vt.edu/followership>. The page includes a navigation menu with options like 'HOME', 'ABOUT THIS PROJECT', 'HISTORY OF FOLLOWERSHIP', 'SEARCH WORDS, STRINGS, AND HEDGES', 'DATA', and 'VISUALIZATIONS'. The main content area is titled 'Introduction' and 'What is Followership?' and begins with the text: 'While there is not yet strong consensus on a definition of following, it may be useful to think of followership as the study of how people engage and interact with their leaders and leadership. It focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers, emphasizing that effective leadership is not just about the actions of the leader but also how followers contribute to and support those actions. While leadership has traditionally been the main'.

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Thank you!

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