

**Research Article****Role of Followership Dimensions in Shaping Leaders' Behavior****Qurat-ul-Ain Qureshi**

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**ABSTRACT**

It was believed that leaders are the most important in the organizations by overlooking the significance of the followers. On the other hand followers have also the same importance and can play important role in shaping the leaders' behavior. Followers through their active engagement and independent critical thinking can bring change in the organizations as well as leaders; behaviors. The aim of this study is to identify the role of followership dimensions in shaping leaders' behavior. A quantitative study design was applied to determine the attributes underlying the phenomenon of followership and transformational leadership style. For this purpose survey approach was used. Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. The nature of the study and data was quantitative and cross sectional. Non-probability sampling technique was used. Frequency, percentage, Cronbach alpha, exploratory factor analysis, correlation and regression were used to test hypotheses. Findings revealed that there is significant relationship found between followership, transactional and transformational leadership styles. Moreover followership significantly predicts leadership behavior. It is concluded that management of higher education institutions must pay attention to followers. Followers can play significant role in the organizations of managers allow them to participate in decision making. This implies that followers have impact on the behavior of their management. They can influence the decisions made by the management. Positive criticism is good for the organizations. It brings effectiveness and makes the organizations efficient. This study is one of the pioneer studies to identify the impact of followers on leadership style in higher education institutions (HEIs).

**KEYWORDS**

Followership Dimensions, Active Engagement, Independent Critical Thinking, Transformational leadership, and Behavior

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

Leadership play important role in success of any organization. Leadership also play important role in enhancing not only organizational performance but also leaders' effectiveness a swell. Numerous studies on leadership have been conducted till date and number of theories and models have been introduced (Busari, 2011; Bass, 1985, 1990, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Amitay, Popper, & Lipshitz, 2005). The most popular model which gained attention of most of the scholars is full range leadership model. This has three attributes but this study has used only two transformational and transactional styles in order to see influence on leadership effectiveness (Baker, 2007). It is believed that leaders influence their followers but Busari (2011) argued that leaders can play significant role in enhancing the leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness consists of aims, groups and followers. Followers are important members in the leadership equations and studies. All the time researchers give more focus to leadership while followership was overlooked and ignored area (Eisenberg, Monge, & Miller, 1983; Eisenberg,

Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Followers got attention after the study of Kelley (1992) model. Followers also mold and reshape their leadership behavior. Therefore Kelley categorized followers in to two categories one critical and non-critical second active and non-active followers. Critical followers do not blindly follow their leaders; they criticized them and disagree with their managers' decision (House & Mansor, 1999; Jassawalla, & Sashittal, 2003).

Therefore this study aims to investigate the impact of followership on shaping the leadership behavior through the lens of social exchange theory (SET). Social exchange theory provides the base for this study. SET argued that supervisors and organizations play significant role in creating positive and significant work attitudes among followers. Moreover SET is based on two aspects one is self-interest and other reciprocity. Self-interest means one can reciprocate the action of supervisor by analyzing the cost and benefit analysis but one thing should be kept in mind that this benefit must not be taken at the cost of others', this relationship between manager and follower should be based on loyalty, respect and fairness (Khan, Abdullah, Busari, Mubushar, & Khan 2020; Stafford, David, & McPherson, 2014; Loftus, Miller, & Burns, 1978). Previously Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) stated that high quality relationship between supervisor and follower is based on trust, communication, participation in organizational matters and due to these high quality relationship followers and supervisors accept the new challenges and open doors of new opportunities so that their business grow and capture the maximum market (Nelson, & Quick 2006). Over the past few years extensive and substantial studies have been conducted on leadership styles and employees' performance (Busari, Khan, Abdullah & Mughal, 2020). Studies conducted in the past focus on organizational change, job demands, job knowledge and satisfaction of telecom sector in Pakistan. Limited evidence is available on the influence of followers on leadership style in HEIs of Pakistan (Khan, 2016). Studies pay sufficient attention to management information system, organizational structure and infrastructure but human resources which are assets of the organizations are ignored (Malik & Masood, 2015). Moreover, past studies focus on macro perspective but the current study focuses on micro perspective. Success of any organization depends upon its employees (followers) who help the organizations to obtain competitive advantage and achieve its objectives. Management of any organizations has to show flexible behavior according to requirement of business environment, if they want their organization to be successful (Oreg *et al.*, 2013). Previously researchers, and scholars give attention to leader-centric approaches but followers' perspective was overlooked in the management literature. Therefore this study tried its best to fill this gap.

### 1.1 | Objective of the Study

- To identify the relationship between followership dimensions (Active engagement, independent critical thinking) and leadership behavior
- To investigate the impact of followership dimensions (Active engagement, independent critical thinking) on leadership behavior

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | Followership Dimensions

Kelley (1992) wrote a book the power of followership in which he stated the two constructs of followers. One is active engagement it means those employees who are self-motivated and high in self-esteem, self-efficacy and organizational citizenship behavior they keep themselves busy in organizational matters, while other is independent critical thinking. These followers object decision of their leaders, do not follow them blindly and criticize them. Kelley further name these role based followership. In which followers play their positive role in influencing their leaders' behaviors and attitude. Kelley used one word for critical and active followers as exemplary followers. Those who criticize the supervisors and play active role in management process are called exemplary followers (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Exemplary followers are considered as supportive and cooperative. They provide constructive criticism which is better for organizational performance. Those followers who are not active and do not provide constructive criticism are called sheep, passive and dependent followers (Kelley, 2008). Apart from these Kelley also introduced pragmatist, conformist and alienated forms of followers those also exhibit different level of critical thinking and active engagement. Leadership is most discussed topic but little is known about importance of followership. According to Crossman and Crossman (2011) majority of the people are leaders but most of them spent their lives in following rather than leading roles. Kelley (1992) book "*Power of Followership*" attracted the attention of the researchers about focusing on followership. Now authors studying leadership and writing books and articles are paying much attention to this topic. Followers and subordinates are used interchangeably. In addition, authors also used the words like partners, collaborators and participants (Uhl-Bien, 2007; Uhl-Bien, *et al.*, 2014).

According to Kellerman (2008) individuals with less power, authority and influence than do their seniors are called followers.

## 2.2 | Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles

Transformational leadership style is considered as the most useful and significant style (Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002; Yukl, 1999). Definitions of leadership given by (Stogdill, 1974, 1948; & Northouse, 2001; Shastri, Mishra, & Sinha, 2010) stated that leadership is based on three pillars one is group, goals and hierarchy in the team. Furthermore Nelson and Quick (2006) argued that leaders have the power to influence others' attitude. House et al (1999) argued that leaders have the ability to motivate employees. Moreover Gardner (1990) said that followers have to achieve the goal on time as set by task manager. On the contrary Shamir (2007) claimed that followers have the ability to mold the attitude and behavior of the manager. This was later on confirmed by Khan, Abdullah, Busari, Mubushar & Khan, (2020). Leaders with charisma and inspirational qualities are called charismatic-inspirational leadership (Bass, 1998). Transformational leaders have the ability to influence and motivate followers, does not criticize followers in public (DeGroot, Kiker, & Cross, 2000), encourage them, involve them in decision making, provide followers with an environment to learn new things and come up with creative and innovative ideas. Leadership and followership literature is categorized as Followership literature, multiple leadership distributed leadership, leader centered theories and individualized and leader-centered theories. Followers and leaders are active functions and people play these functions at diverse times at their work place. These two terms are two different sides of a coin which cannot be separated from each other. Leaders need followers to execute their policies and followers are reflections of their managers. All leaders were sometimes followers and without followers one cannot be a leader.

## 2.3 | Hypotheses of the Study

Relationship between followership dimensions and transformational leadership has been reported positive and significant (Khan, *et al.* 2020; Khan *et al.* 2018, Busari, Khan, Abdullah & Mughal, 2020). Exemplary followers provide constructive criticism and considered as one of the supportive (Druker, 1969), creative and cooperative followers (Northouse, 2001). Leaders should encourage them to come up with new ideas and problem solving techniques (Weber, 1968). Followership has positive and significant influence on leadership styles (Shamir, 2007' Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Followers with their critical thinking and active engagement can modify their management behavior significantly (Khan *et al.*, 2020; Abbas *et al.*, 2022). Shamir (2007) also found a significant impact of followership on leadership style. On the basis of above discussions following hypotheses are proposed:

H<sub>1</sub>: Followership dimensions significantly correlates with leadership behavior

H<sub>2</sub>: Followership dimensions significantly predicts leadership behavior

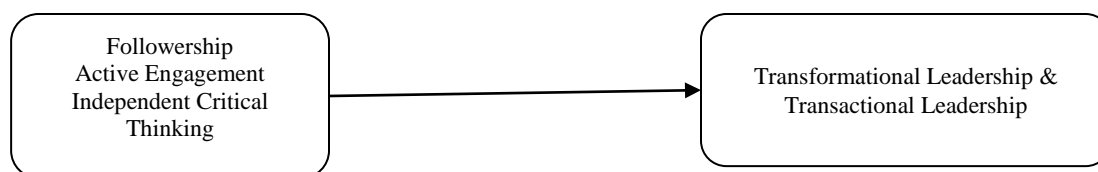


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

## 3 | RESEARCH METHODS

### 3.1 | Research Design Population and Sampling

This study is quantitative in nature and survey approach was used. Nature if the data is cross-sectional. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaire. Population of the current study was faculty members from Gomal and Qurtuba universities. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample and Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate the sample size. Prior to data collection permission was taken from respondents. There were total 415 respondents out of which 205 were selected as sample size.

### 3.2 | Data Collection and Analysis Tools

Questionnaires were distributed among faculty members and three to four days were given to them so that they may read understand and choose the correct response which suits them better. 205 completed questionnaires were received and used in the final analysis. Frequency, percentage, Cronbach alpha, exploratory factor analysis, correlation and regression were used in SPSS.

## 4 | RESULTS

Table 1 presented the findings of reliability analysis. Threshold for reliability analyses is  $>0.70$  (Field, 2013). It is revealed in the results that all the scales i.e. transformational and transactional leadership styles and followership dimensions met the cut off level hence the scales used in the study are found reliable.

**Table 1**  
Reliability Analysis

Variables	Construct	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Transformational Leadership	5	20	0.842
Transactional Leadership	3	12	
Followership Dimension	2	20	0.750

**Table 2**  
Exploratory Factor Analysis

Variables	Loadings	KMO	BTS	p
Transformational & Transactional Leadership	0.402-0.866	0.616	2140.017	0.000
Followership	0.403-0.717	0.618	1022.313	0.000

In order to explore the validity of the questionnaires, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was run. Threshold for  $KMO > 0.50$ , BTS must be significant at  $P < 0.05$  level and factor loadings must be higher than 0.40 (Field, 2013; Blaikie, 2003; Devaus, 2002), Table 2 revealed that all the factor loadings of transformational and transactional leadership styles and followership dimension met the cut off level and KMO values  $> 0.5$ , BTS are significant. Therefore it is assumed that questionnaires used in this study are found valid.

**Table 3**  
Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
TFL	1			
TRL	.664**	1		
FD	.722**	.605**	1	

\*\* \*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 & 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It has been identified in Table 3 that relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles is found significant ( $0.664^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); transformational and followership dimensions is ( $0.722^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); while transactional and followership is ( $0.605^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) hence first hypotheses is accepted.

**Table 4**  
Regression Results (Direct Effects Testing)

Criterion	Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	$\beta$	p
Leadership Behavior	Constant	0.74	0.55	124.00		
	FD				0.74	0.000

Regression analysis was run to test second hypotheses. Table 4 presented the findings of second hypotheses. It was found that transformational and transactional leadership styles explained 55% variance upon leadership styles. Moreover goodness of fit  $F=124$   $p<0.01$ , and unit of change  $\beta=0.57$ ,  $p<0.01$  are found significant. This implies that one percent change in followership could bring 57% change in leadership behavior.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to identify the relationship between followership dimensions in shaping leadership behavior. For this purpose survey approach was used. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample. Descriptive and inferential statistics was applied to test hypotheses. It was revealed from the findings that there is significant relationship found between followership and leadership styles (Bass, 1997; Blythe, & Gardner, 1990). The findings of the current study are in agreement with findings of Khan *et al.*, (2020) also reported the significant relationship between followership and leadership. Moreover Khan, Busari, Abdullah and Mughal (2018) also reported the positive and significant relationship between followership and leadership styles. Furthermore Busari, Khan, Abdullah and Mughal, (2020) reported significant impact of followership in leadership styles. Hence both  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  hypotheses are substantiated. Followership is as important as leadership. It is evident from the findings of the current study that if followers play their active role and management involved them into decision making matters, followers would be able to make significant contributions by giving fruitful suggestions and may have significant impact in reshaping and modifying their leaders' behavior. This study significantly contributed to social exchange theory and social learning theory.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Kelley (1992) followership dimension is a strong predictor of leadership behavior. The findings of this study supported the notion given by Kelley (1992) and Khan *et al.* (2020). Management must focus on the importance of followership and managers with high level of willingness to allow followers to be part of important matters would be able to enhance their effectiveness (Barrow, 1976).

## 7 | PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study are helpful for managers, administrators in higher education institutions (HEIs) to recognize the importance of followers and give them chance to participate in decision making, get their feedback and listen to their suggestions and problems. It would not only increase the motivation level of employees, as well as leadership effectiveness (Limsila, & Ogunlana, 2007; Robson, 2002).

## 8 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has few limitations. First this study is conducted in education institutions so one must be careful while generalizing the findings to other sectors. Second, this study has used simple model while other studies can add mediators such as trust in leadership, leader member exchange and personality traits as mediators and moderators to have better understanding of the subject matter.

**Conflict of Interest:** There is no competing interest

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