

The Nexus Between Followership and Entrepreneurial Leadership: A Firm-Level Analysis

**Raushan Gross
Pfeiffer University**

This paper theoretically investigates the unexplored nature of followership in relation to another unexplored area of leadership—entrepreneurial leadership. Although there have been minute writings that have delved into follower styles and an overabundance on leader styles, this paper recognizes the critical role of those who faithfully and earnestly support leadership in the pursuit of novel endeavors. Extracting from the extant literature on entrepreneurial leadership and the salient followership models, the author ascertained a vivid bipartite of the entrepreneurial leadership and follower styles. Followership styles need further integration into the leadership domain. This assertion has been echoed by those in this vineyard. Additionally, a strain of the Austrian School view of entrepreneurship has been injected in this paper because of the fundamental need to describe the actions of those who seek to take risks, deal in uncertainty, and seek opportunity under the auspice of the firm. Followership and entrepreneurial leadership models are interwoven, highlighting the nexus between the two and illuminating potentialities for further investigation and inquiry.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Followership, Leadership, Austrian Entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

Many of the great organizations of our day have employed numerous types of knowledge bases (i.e., technical, functional, and managerial) to effectively compete and create competitive advantages in market economies (Chandler, 2009). These great organizations were led by leaders during their time who were not only entrepreneurial but transformative and became catalysts in strategically initiating learning bases. Organizations such as RCA, Philco, AT&T, IBM, Apple, Google, and Sun Systems—to name a few—were fueled by the ingenuity of their leadership and the ingenuity of their followers. The followers in this organizations remain the unsung proxies to the entrepreneurial leaders who guided innovations within these firms. For instance, at Corning, great pride and attention were placed on employees who supported innovation to the point that division leaders rewarded followers who were committed to pioneering innovations. Smaller divisional entrepreneurial leadership allowed followers to pursue problem-solving projects that fueled their personal interests; importantly, there was a climate for those who did not want to be in the spotlight (Graham & Shuldiner, 2001). What was the connection between those who followed and those who led these organizations? With such a robust amount of literature on leadership, there is much less in the vineyard of followership and followership styles. Even Henry Ford described his most

entrepreneurial subordinates as *tinkerers*, and the tinkerers were the subordinates (i.e., followers) who helped create the famous Model T (Zunz, 1990).

At the microlevel of the firm, there were successful start-ups that had effective leadership, particularly Zenith and Raython, at the beginning of the electronic age boom (Chandler, 2009). Most, in not all, of these major start-ups were created by entrepreneurs and their followers. DHL (i.e. Daisey, Hillblom, & Lynn), the logistics company, described the earlier carriers as “something different” (Chung & Bowie, 2017, p. 26) as each carrier was “an integral part of the service chain” (p. 26). Nevertheless, DHL followers knew they were providing a means to an end for businesses across the world that was like no other provider at that time. Quinn (1979) suggested that entrepreneurship is the most successful function in the market economy system for meeting humans’ newest needs. IBM, a company that has met business and consumer needs, is a good example of interfirm entrepreneurial leadership; they required their entrepreneurial leadership to possess high expertise, committed champions, and risk-taking support (Quinn, 1979). That is, IBM management “assembled first-rate people and supply them with a leader possessing extensive knowledge about their underlying art” (Quinn, 1979, p. 555). These examples show the dynamic relationship between leadership and followership, which transmits to the performance of the firm. Not all firms have a culture that allows for unhampered entrepreneurship—pervasive is management that leads through a change of environment but do not unhamper the entrepreneurial spirit when the time arises (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Entrepreneurship has been discussed as an interorganizational role (Mintzberg, 1989) and as an initiator of planned change and controlled exploitation of opportunities (Yukl, 2009). Mintzberg (1989) described managers as decision makers with one role—being entrepreneurial. Mintzberg wrote that the entrepreneurially minded manager leads projects and hands them down to subordinates when there is a project–job fit.

Throughout the entrepreneurial literature, entrepreneurs have been described as decision makers (Marshall, 1961; Mintzberg, 1989) and innovators (Schumpeter, 1934, 1963) who are disruptive to the equilibrium of markets (Kirzner, 1973). Entrepreneurs are purposeful and possess a keen alertness to opportunity (Kirzner, 1997) and engage in action in the marketplace (Mises, 1951). The conceptualization of human action was established by Mises (1949/1998) who suggested that the entrepreneur type is one who displays leadership and purposeful human action with the strong characteristics of a promotor (Salerno, 2008). Does the follower of an entrepreneurial leader have the same function as the entrepreneur? Is there a relationship between a follower and the entrepreneurial leader’s actions in discovery and innovation pursuits within the firm? There are gaps in the management, strategy, and leadership literature on the entrepreneurial qualities of leadership related to followership. There has been theoretical steps made in the direction of organizational assessment of follower and leader exhibiting entrepreneurial characteristics that drives performance and profits and decrease losses (Foss & Klein, 2008).

One of the main issues with the follower–leader literature is the absence of clear examples that can inform how the dynamic relationship is seen from followers work at the firm level and its impact on the effectiveness of entrepreneurial leadership. That is the primary objective. Subsequently, a couple questions arise. What is the nexus between followership styles and entrepreneurial leadership? Is there a one-to-one match between followers and certain entrepreneurial leaders? Either way the relationship is viewed, this paper starts a critical inquiry. Are certain follower styles more inclined to support leadership that is entrepreneurial? Is the relationship between followership style and entrepreneurial leadership temporal in nature? That is, over time do followership styles change due to environmental changes, knowledge-based changes, or changes in the internal climate? These questions are analyzed using the management, leadership, and entrepreneurial leadership literature.

Another objective of this study is to integrate followership theory with entrepreneurial leadership theory that will in effect show that entrepreneurial leadership has to take into account the effectiveness of followership and to acknowledge that followers are active participants and play vital roles in creating and developing entrepreneurial pursuits (Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Follower and leader take human action. Küpers (2007) agreed that “followership has been an understudied topic in the academic literature, only little attention has been given to followers *sui generis*, who accord or withdraw support to leaders”

(p. 195). The lack of analysis of followership and the typical notion that followers know how to follow and are mindless participants explains why the literature has not been fruitful. According to Crossman and Crossman (2011), leadership and followership have four major overlapping themes: (a) individualized or leader-centered theories, (b) leader-centered theories that rely on follower perspectives, (c) multiple leadership (shared/distributive), and (d) the follower per se. The current inquiry follows the latter category, *mutatis mutandis*, without a fully integrated connection with a specific type of leadership (i.e., entrepreneurial leadership).

Followership has been one of the least analyzed concepts (Crossman & Crossman, 2011) in the leadership, management, and entrepreneurship literature (Vecchio, 2003), but is one of the most active and participative roles in the leader–follower dyad (Kelley, 1992). Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, and Morris (2006) reinforced this notion: “Followers and leaders are linked together in interrelated roles and are dependent on each other . . . [and] followership is what enables that leadership the opportunity to succeed” (p. 315). While this is certainly true based on leadership principles and broad in scope, and but needs to be further examined from a followership perspective, as to which type of followers are likely to be led by entrepreneurial leaders? Vecchio’s (2003) statement leads this inquiry: “Followers who work for an entrepreneur/founder are likely to have more opportunities for greater interpersonal contact with the leader/founder, it is also worth considering what this increased contact may mean to each follower” (p. 316).

This inquiry is timely. It is intended to update the literature with a paradigm shift toward a more entrepreneurial organization and the climate of the current business landscape, which calls on subordinates and management to harness and exemplify entrepreneurial leadership institutionally between business units and teams. “The recognition and exploitation of new business opportunities are called for in entrepreneurship research” (Hoskisson, Covin, Volberda, & Johnson, 2011, p. 1,144). Henceforth, the current study consists of a literature review, conceptual framework, implications, and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Followership Styles and Models

Kelley (1988,1992) is one of the most prominent proponents of followership and has set the stage with a model that is very much the basis for the current inquiry in this topic domain. Because followership has been an understudied and observed phenomenon, there has been mixed review as to the importance and role of followers. Kelley (2008) described the basic view pertaining to the conceptualization of followership: “These folks believed that being a strong #2 often allowed for greater contributions than being in the #1 spot and that making the assist was just as important as making the score. Many had no desire to be leaders” (p. 6). Followership has been, in its broadest sense, described as participants in a team effort, active participants who act with enthusiasm and independence, as those who both think critically and act (Kelley, 1992).

Kelley (1992) provided one of the most salient models in the followership literature. According to Kelley’s model, there are five followership styles: alienated, exemplary, passive, conformist, and pragmatist. The axis in which each followership falls is broken down into four categorical quadrants: independent, critical thinkers; dependent, uncritical thinkers; passive; or active. Alienated followers embody a healthy skepticism pertaining to the organization. They think critically and do not participate in group or team environments; they are extremely independent. Exemplary followers are independent thinkers and actively engaged when it comes to working with others. Passive followers rely heavily on leadership to do all of the thinking for them and need excessive direction and orders. This type of leadership is characterized by low participation and low independent thinking. Conformist followers are willing to take orders and are likely to wait on leadership to point the direction. This follower type is very active but is low on independent thinking. Kelley called this type of follower *yes people*. Lastly, pragmatist followers are in the *middle* when it comes to the characterizations of the other four follower styles (Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 1992).

Chaleff (1997) developed a model that closely related with the model developed by Kelley (1992). With a few differences in the description of four follower types, the general idea postulates followers' power and their subsequent development (Kellerman, 2008). Chaleff's model has four followership styles based on the degree of follower support to leadership (i.e., high or low) and the degree to which followers challenge leadership (i.e., high or low): implementer, partner, individualist, and resource. The implementer is the most common, as superiors depend on this type to get things done, which is especially the case in larger organizations. The partner totally supports leadership initiatives but is willing to challenge leadership if the situation calls for it. Individualists are open about their feelings and ideas, challenge leadership, and at times withhold their support. Individuals with a resource follower style work honestly *for a few day's pay* but will not go beyond what is expected of them. The four followership styles are dichotomized into four quadrants; each quadrant has four axes labeled high support, low support, high challenge, and low challenge. The implementer is high support and low challenge, the partner style is high support and high challenge, the individualist style is high challenge and low support, and the resource style is low challenge low support.

Baker (2007) developed followership criteria and outlining that (a) followership pertains to a role, (b) followership is active and not passive, (c) followership and leadership share a common purpose, and (d) the relationship between followers and leaders is significant. Are all followers the same? Bjugstad et al. (2006) suggested there are effective and ineffective followers and that a distinction should be made to understand the impact of followership on organizational performance. Agho (2009) and Bjugstad et al. both characterized the follower in a light that presupposes the follower to be just as engaged in performance and impact as a given leader. Given, the hierarchal nature of many organizations, followers are honest, creditable, and self-initiated in process and goals that are aligned with organizational leadership (Agho, 2009; Bjugstad et al., 2006). Agho asserted, "Failure to recognize followership as a complement of leadership may undermine organizational effectiveness and efficiency" (p. 2). Agho's (2009) line of analysis of the follower was initiated from a study where 302 senior-level executives were probed as to their perception of effective followers (and leaders). Agho found distinct, yet significant, differences between effective followers and leaders. Bjugstad et al. (2006) asserted that effective followers are enthusiastic, self-reliant, and positively participate in organizational goals. Like Bjugstad et al., Agho characterized followers with a similar but different adjective; they are characterized as mature, caring, dependable, inspiring, and forward looking. Using a follower-centered approach, Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, and Carsten (2014) asserted, "The fundamental attribution error leads followers to over-attribute causality for group outcomes to the leader" (p. 86).

Entrepreneurial Leadership

McGrath and MacMillian (2000) clearly explained the role and function of entrepreneurial leadership. First, entrepreneurial leaders find novel ways to harness opportunities and to find competitive insights within the firm; second, entrepreneurial leaders seek novel and effective activities to employ and encourage others to discard the ineffective activities (McGrath & MacMillian, 2000). Entrepreneurial initiatives are sought by this type of leadership, namely because entrepreneurial leaders are path definers and push to clear paths to develop a learning base for new opportunity exploitation.

From an entrepreneurial leadership perspective, three activities fall under the role of entrepreneurial leadership: set the climate, orchestrate the process of realizing opportunity, and solve problems with others on new ventures to grow the business (McGrath & MacMillian, 2000). Entrepreneurial leadership has been most effectively described as "a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions" (Kuratko, 2007, p. 3). This particular type of leadership has roots in the traditional forms of leadership that are so often articulated in the leadership literature; however, entrepreneurial leadership is one of the most neglected areas of leadership and needs to be integrated into other areas of research (Antonakis & Autio, 2007; Vecchio, 2003).

One of the main areas of departure between leadership and entrepreneurial leadership is that "entrepreneurial leaders influence and motivate others to pursue entrepreneurial goals" (Gupta,

MacMillan, & Surie, 2004). This departure is significant because of the closeness of entrepreneurial leaders with the often-debated characteristics of an entrepreneur. Moravec (1994) reinforced the notion of diversion between entrepreneurial leadership and other leadership by noting that “corporations now undergo paradigm shifts rather than linear change. One such paradigm shift is from a ‘producer mentality’ that seeks instructions to an ‘entrepreneurial mentality’” (p. 4) that seeks results. Greenberger and Sexton (1988), for example, said “entrepreneurs are likely to have some abstract image in mind about what they intend to accomplish . . . [and they] must be able to create a similar image in the minds of others” (p. 5).

Surie and Ashley (2007) echoed other definitions of entrepreneurial leadership that find that it is a function where “leadership [is] capable of sustaining innovation and adaptation in high velocity and uncertain environments” (p. 235). Kuratko (2007) established that entrepreneurial leaders are risk takers, idea champions, prime innovators, and unintentionally cross-sectional in efforts to establish direction for the firm. They have a willingness to change direction and a tolerance for ambiguous situations and uncertain futures (Guth & Ginsberg, 1990; Sathé, 1985). The firm employs entrepreneurial leadership as a proponent to secure competitive advantages in market economies by being path definers and first movers—transferring individual capabilities to organizational capabilities (Chandler, 2009). Building and creating competitive advantages entails a path-defining learning orientation and transferring capabilities, which Fernald, Solomon, and Tarabishy (2005) forthrightly provided. Entrepreneurial leaders create and drive a vision for the future, solve problems, take risks, and initiate strategies—placing structures in place to flex entrepreneurship within the firm (Fernald et al., 2005). Entrepreneurial leaders are problem solvers who clear paths and define learning paths that would otherwise go unnoticed. This type of leadership expands absorptive capacity and communicates and transmits values to action in entrepreneurial goals. Therefore, the undistinguishable criterion of entrepreneurial leaders is that they shoulder the burden of *risks* and *uncertainty* unlike any other form of leadership (Knight, 1921). In Gartner’s (1988) words, the “entrepreneur . . . [causes] entrepreneurship” (p. 48).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With the primary objective in mind—connecting followership style with entrepreneurial leadership—the theoretical framework explores the different followership styles against the characteristics of entrepreneurial leadership. These two theories have not been integrated or established to understand if it matters or not if there is a connection between (i.e., exemplary followership with entrepreneurial leadership). There may not be a match of each characteristic, but the characteristics should be viewed as a spectrum because other factors should be considered (i.e., organizational climate, psychological factors, preferences, etc.). However, this serves as a baseline inquiry. Figures 1 and 2 display two models of followership (Chaleff, 1997; Kelley, 1992) that show the contrast between entrepreneurial leadership characteristics.

FIGURE 1
KELLEY'S (1992) FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES CONTRASTED WITH
ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

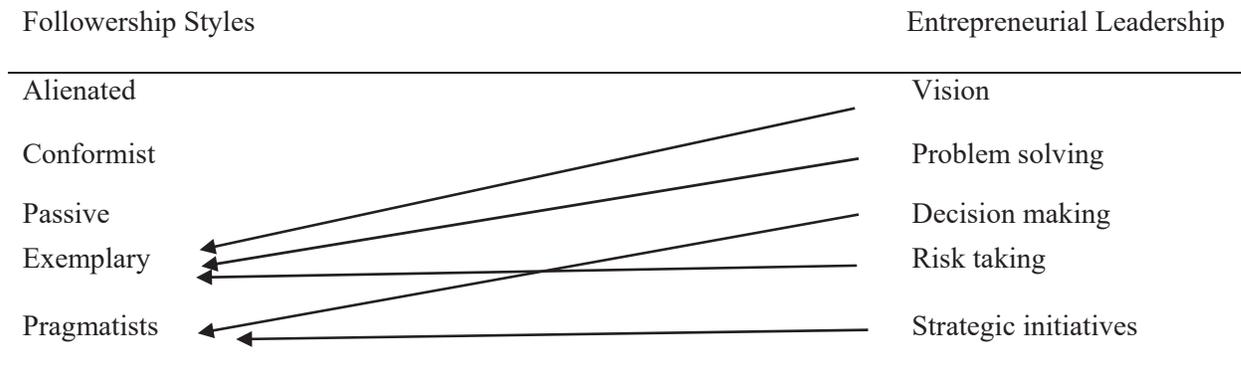
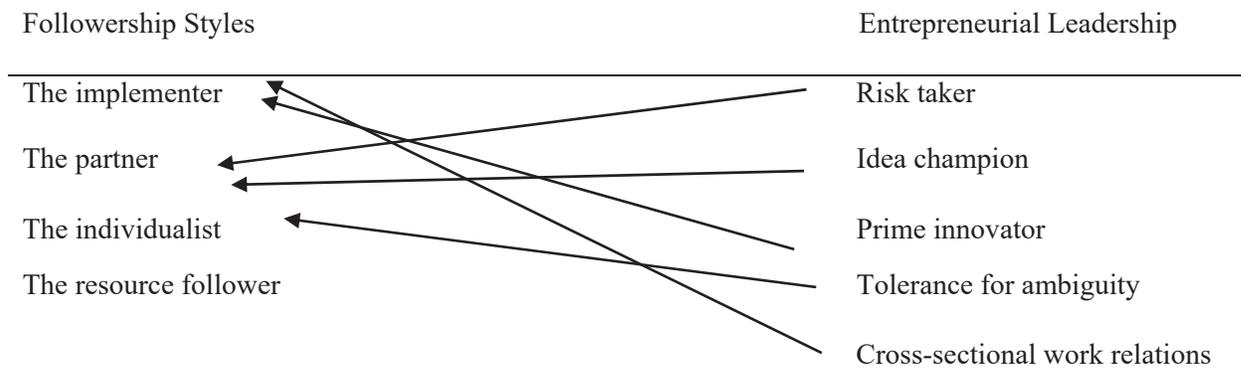


FIGURE 2
CHALEFF'S (1997) FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES CONTRASTED WITH
ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP



Figures 1 and 2 display two models that show connections between nine followership styles and 10 characteristics of entrepreneurial leaders developed by Kuratko (2007) and Fernald et al. (2005). Based on two models, not all followership styles coincide with entrepreneurial leadership. Some follower styles do not align with the nature of what is characterized by entrepreneurial leadership. Some follower styles might pose a hinderance to those who are entrepreneurial—those pursuing entrepreneurial goals within the organizational context. Also, there seems to be more evenly connected entrepreneurial leadership characterizations between Chaleff's (1997) followership styles and Kuratko's entrepreneurial leadership. These assertions follow that followers' styles are driven "internally, and a leader merely taps into the internal power of the follower" (Bjugstad et al., 2006, p. 306). The figures also show relationships that might reflect a causal relationship "between follower and leader and how well their personal characteristics match up" (Bjugstad et al., 2006, p. 306).

Tables 1 and 2 depict a more focused linkage between followership styles that is more likely to be led by or with entrepreneurial leaders with characteristics as specified by Fernald et al. (2005) and Kuratko (2007). While these tables are not intended to provide a perfect match, it initiates a theoretical perspective that needs further qualitative or quantitative analysis and testing. With that in mind, the casual observation of Tables 1 and 2 might illustrate some basic followership motivations, which is more illuminating in Table 2. Chaleff's (1997) followership styles seem to be a basis in firm-level orientation.

This is a rather significant point, being that Chaleff's followership styles are mostly concerned with followership development rather than leadership and its effect on the consequences of followers (Kellerman, 2008).

TABLE 1
FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES AND ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

Kelley's (1992) followership styles	Entrepreneurial leadership characteristics
Exemplary	Vision Problem solving Risk taking
Pragmatist	Decision making Strategic initiatives

Fernald et al., 2005

TABLE 2
FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES AND ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

Chaleff's (1997) followership styles	Entrepreneurial Leadership characteristics
Partner	Risk taker Idea champion
Individualist	Prime innovator Tolerance for ambiguity
Implementer	Cross-sectional work relations

Kuratko, 2007

IMPLICATIONS

First-mover firms have an advantage over path-follower firms in a market exchange economy. To define paths and develop firm strength embedded in a learning base, it is insightful to understand the follower entrepreneurial leadership connection. There is a litany of perspectives and propositions on the traits, characteristics, and consequence of leadership, but there is an urgent need to understand the followership styles that are primed to be led by entrepreneurial leaders. Knowing what this synthesis between followership styles and entrepreneurial leadership looks like in the firm is equally advantageous.

An absence of leadership, no doubt, interrupts the transmission of values and vision needed to form an entrepreneurial spirit (Soriano & Martinez, 2007). To take it one step farther, it is a dynamic between followers and their style and a generic entrepreneurial spirit that leads the charge. That is, the specificity of designation between follower and leader can be nullified—as this dynamic is circumventable. The reality of this dynamic is that all too often there are mismatches, where leaders are unfamiliar with or do

not perceive the motivations or the style of followership of subordinates at any point in time. There are many extraneous variables that could perhaps incentivize an adapted followership style and those that can disincentivize the same.

With today's firms ever more searching for competitive positioning and exploring innovative techniques to bolster effectiveness, entrepreneurial leadership has to be a proponent of and advocate for those people who take pride in a supporting role—those “without the most glamorous work and without the fanfare” (Wren, 1995, p.196). Firms that can rely on effective followers benefit from the advantages profited from their self-assertiveness and commitment to the purpose of their work. While there are many reasons followers are vital to the performance of the firm, some of the most impactful reasons are they are continuous learners of skills and education that are useful to the firm and oftentimes hold higher performance standards than is required in their work environment (Wren, 1995).

Entrepreneurial leadership is not only an inherent characteristic that individuals possess at any point in time but a phenomenon that is cultivated by the climate of the firm and the external environment. That is, constrained strategists are likely to hamper an entrepreneurial environment, while unconstrained strategists are more likely to unhamper the entrepreneurial spirit, thus allowing for a connection between the follower style and entrepreneurial fit to take place. This implies that structure must consider the possibility for there to be a follower style fit and relations and motivations to merge in order to drive follower motivation to link with entrepreneurial leaders. Because there are no such things as entrepreneurial leadership styles, then it would be difficult to speak on a possible goal for entrepreneurial leadership per se. If entrepreneurial leadership were categorically placed into styles, it would then be feasible to place a goal orientation on a style; however, entrepreneurial leaders visualize and are motivated toward goals both intentionally and unintentionally. Due to the inherent inflexibility of models, the two followership models constrain the flesh-and-blood real-world situations where follower styles may change temporally or situationally, the same with leadership styles (Bjugstad et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

There is only a handful of literature on the area of followership; only few authors have been willing to explore this area. Therefore, this theoretical perspective established a few points worthy of mention. This paper built on the most salient models in the followership area developed by Kelley (1992) and Chaleff's (1997) and built upon them the perspective that indeed there might be followership styles that are linked with a unique type of leadership, specifically entrepreneurial leadership. This paper developed two models to show the specific followership style in connection with the specified entrepreneurial characteristics provided by Kuratko (2007) and Fernald et al. (2005). Clearly there is and can be what might be called the entrepreneurial follower. This entrepreneurial follower is closely related to an Austrian School view of innovation, action, and competitiveness. Finally, this paper introduced two integrative concepts into the leadership literature that will be advantageous for further exploration and empirical testing.

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