Followership and Employee Engagement

"Able leaders emerge from the ranks of able followers."

West Point Theory

Introduction

The essence of leadership is followership for without followers there can be no leaders. There can be no leaders without followers. In leading you follow, and in following, you lead, therefore, you must know how to follow before you can lead and the capacity to be a truly effective follower results from achieving the capacity to lead.

At work most people, particularly managers, have a dual role – leading (particularly themselves) and being led, managing and being managed.

Followership is a fundamental dimension of human organisation; without it organisations would soon degenerate into chaos. Whilst libraries are filled with texts on Leadership remarkably little attention has been paid to the equally important Followership.

Followership Defined

A leader can be a follower and a follower can be a leader, dependent upon the situation and their roles. Followership is the process of following and/or being guided and directed by a leader. The followership process is designed to coordinate the follower's actions or goals with those of the leader to achieve the leader's goals or objectives.

Followership Needs

Goffee and Jones (2001) suggest that people '…. seek, admire, respect and follow leaders who produce within them three emotional responses:

1. significance – 'you and what you do really matter
2. inclusion and common purpose, and
3. Engaged – a feeling of being excited and challenged.

Schultz W. FIRO-B (1962) suggested that there are three fundament human social needs that need to be meet by the individual and their group:

→ Inclusion : To include and to be included

→ Control: To influence and to be influenced, and

→ Affection: To give affection and to receive affection

These three factors Schultz have a particular impact on the 2nd response that Goffee & Jones identified – inclusion and common purpose.

Qualities of Effective Followers

Kelley (1988) suggests that effective followers share the following essential qualities:

→ They manage themselves well.

→ They are committed to the organisation and to a purpose, principle, or person outside themselves.

→ They build their competence and focus their efforts for maximum impact.

→ They are courageous, honest and credible.

3 Crucial Aptitudes of Followership

Kelley suggests that they also posses 3 crucial aptitudes:

1. Awareness & Understanding	✓ Awareness of leaders' requirements and expectations ✓ Accurately understand directions & instructions
2. Willingness and Problem-solving responsibility	✓ Motivation to act on/implement directions ✓ Willingness to take responsibility for the quality of the relationship
3. Utilization Capability	✓ (After getting1 & 2 right) the ability to manage oneself in forming an effective leader/follower relationship

Kelley developed a two dimension model of followership:

(i)   Thinking ranging from –

Independent, critical   ➔ think for themselves,' 'give constructive
thinking people who: criticism,
                              ➔ are their own person, and
                              ➔ innovative and creative, through to people

Dependent, uncritical   ➔ must be told what to do,
thinking people who: ➔ don't think.'

In between are the typical followers, who 'take direction' and 'don't challenge leader or group'. (Kelley 1992).

(ii)   Engagement the degree of active engagement in work –

                              ✓ take initiative,
Active – people who: ✓ assume ownership
                              ✓ participate actively
                              ✓ are self-starters, and who,
                              ✓ go above and beyond the job.

                              ✓ passive and lazy,
Passive –people who are: ✓ need prodding,
                              ✓ require constant supervision, and
                              ✓ dodge responsibility.

In between these extremes are the typical followers who 'get the job done without supervision after being told what to do,' and 'shift with the wind' (Kelley 1992).

Kelley's Two Dimension Model of Followership (taken Kelly 1998 *In Praise of Followers)*

Figure 1. Two-Dimensional Model of Follower Behavior (Kelley 1998)
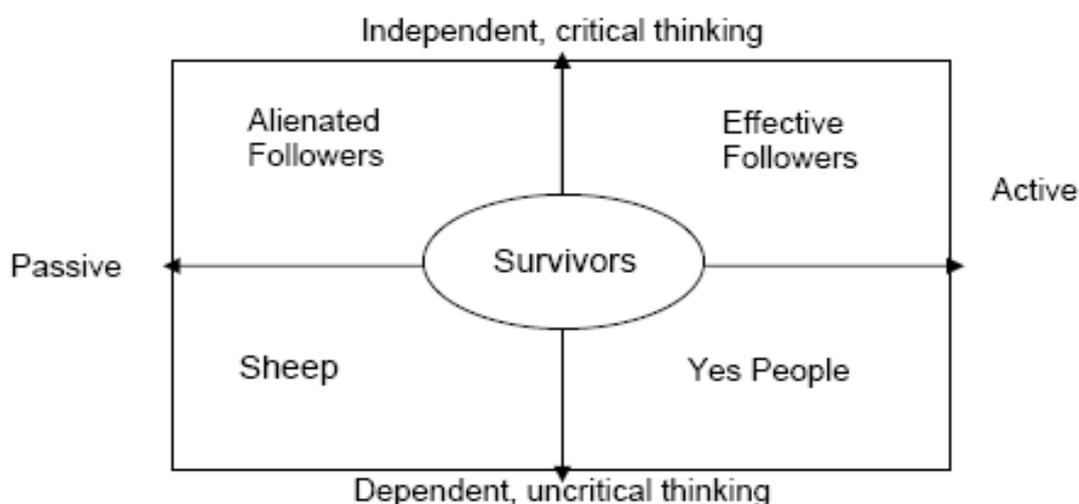
Kelley's model provides for five categories of followers:

➔ **Effective followers** - Effective followers are ideal in almost all ways, excelling at all tasks, engaging strongly with the group

➔ **Alienated followers** - Alienated followers are deep and independent thinkers who do not willingly commit to any leader.

➔ **Survivors**- Survivors are pragmatic followers are middle to neutral in their independence, engagement and general participation

➔ **Yes followers** - Yes followers conform to what is required. Whilst being more participative than sheep/passive they do not provoke or provide particular challenges

➔ **Sheep - Passive followers** -Sheep – these passive followers do follow instructions, do not think critically and are not particularly active participants.

Harvard professor Abraham Zaleznik (1965) provided an early model of followership, His was also a two dimensions model; submission vs. control and activity vs. passivity.
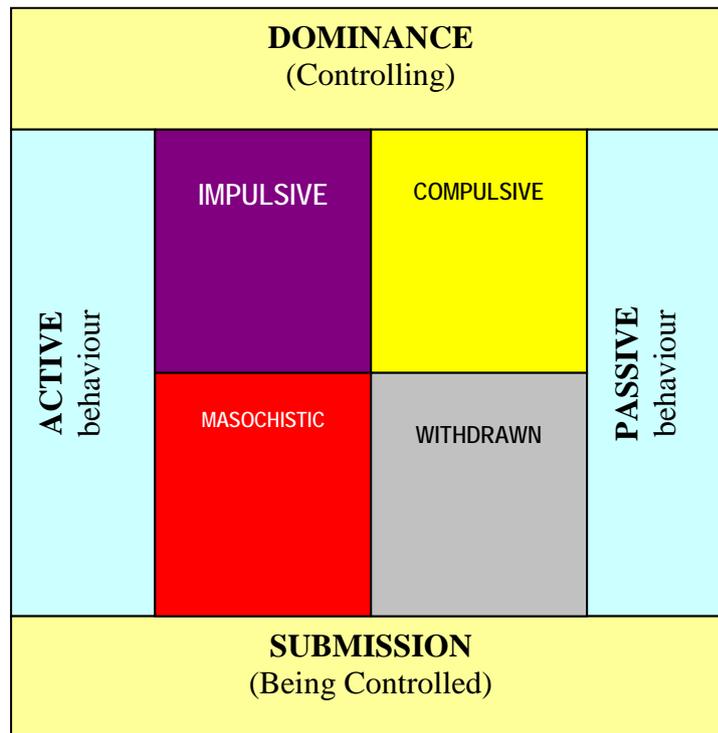
In Zaleznik's model:

→ **Controlling** followers want to control their managers/leaders,

→ **Submissive** followers await instruction and want to be told what to do.

→ **Active** followers initiate and intervene, and

→ **Passive** followers wait for things to happen.

→ **Impulsive** followers are sometimes spontaneous and courageous and can be rebellious. They can try to take control and to lead.

→ **Compulsives** want to dominate their leaders, but act with restraint. They can feel guilty about their compulsive tendencies.

→ **Masochistic:** whilst masochists may feel uncomfortable with being dominated they can want to submit to control and authority

→ **Withdrawn** followers don't care about what happens at work. They take minimal or little part in work activities other than doing the minimum required to retain their jobs.

Ira Chaleff in The Courageous Follower (1995) classified followers on the extent to which they supported their leaders as opposed to how much they challenged them i.e.

➔ **Partners** – people who like to be treated as equals to the leader, although they respect the leader's position. They are thus strong supporters but will provide intelligent challenge where they deem necessary.

➔ **Individualists -** Individualists are not easy followers and will tend to think for themselves and prefer to do as they want.

➔ **Implementers -** the majority of people in an organization, they take orders, follow instruction and complete tasks without any real questioning of instructions and or the goals.

➔ **Resources** – people who do what is requested of them, but little more. They are blindly obedient but lack the intelligence or courage to provide challenge.

Most recently, Barbara Kellerman, What Every Leader Needs to Know about Followers (2007), has categorised follower according to their level of engagement:

➔ **Diehards** – dedicated people who are passionate about an idea a person or both and will give all for them.

➔ **Activists** – eager and energetic, people who feel strongly about their organizations and leaders and act accordingly.

➔ **Participants** – these people care about their organization and try to make a contribution. Their allegiance is often external to the organisation and if they agree with their leader/s they will support them. If they disagree, they will oppose them.

➔ **Isolates** – people who don't care about their leaders and do not particularly respond to them. They do their jobs and that's it.

➔ **Bystanders** – people disengaged from their organization, watching from the sidelines almost as an observer. They go along passively but they offer little active support.

Kellerman's typography lends itself to the five profiles of employee engagement (Meere 2006):

HIGHLY ENGAGED	These people work with real passion and feel a profound connection to their organisation. They are focused and highly productive. They are passionate about their job and the outcomes they achieve. Their discretionary effort is very high. They are highly dedicated, exhibiting very strong emotional and rational commitment to their job, teams, managers and organisation.
ENGAGED	These people are good hard workers. They are dedicated. They can be relied upon to 'put-in'. Their discretionary effort level is high and they are reasonably committed.
NEUTRAL	These dependable people get their job done participate but are only moderately dedicated and will usually respond positively for requests for discretionary effort but do not often volunteer it. They tend to come in, do their job and go home. They are only moderately committed to their job, their team, their manager and their organisation. They can be influenced to join either the 'engaged' or 'disengaged'.
DISENGAGED	When they want to be these people can be good workers. Their productively, discretionary effort and commitment is generally low. There is a low level of care.
HIGHLY DISENGAGED	These people often have a negative commitment to their job, their manager and their organisation. They may have a strong commitment to like-minded disaffected people. They can undermine the work of their engaged colleagues on a daily basis. Their productivity is low and they often exhibit 'passive aggressive' behaviour to get back at the organisation. They hate coming to work and resent their situation. They give as little of their time and talent as they can get away with. They often act out their unhappiness at work.

The following table sets out a comparison of employee engagement profiles worldwide.

Country	Engaged	Neutral	Disengaged
Australia	18	63	19
Belgium	18	67	15
Brazil	31	62	7
Canada	17	66	17
Chile	25	62	13
China	8	67	25
France	9	68	23
Germany	15	70	15
India	7	37	56
Ireland	15	70	15
Israel	23	63	14
Italy	7	64	29
Japan	2	57	41
Mexico	40	51	9
Netherlands	8	73	19
New Zealand	23	64	13
Singapore	6	77	17
South Korea	9	71	20
Spain	11	64	25
U.K.	12	65	23
U.S.A.	21	63	16
Average	**15.48**	**64.00**	**20.52**
Australia:	**18**	**63**	**19**
Comparison to average	**2.52**	**-1.00**	**-1.52**
Based on data from: 2003 The Gallup Organisation. Princeton N.J 2004 Towers Perrin. 2004. European Talent Survey 2006 Towers Perrin 2006 China Employee Engagement Survey.			

Given these profiles and their attendant opportunity costs it is very timely for organisations to turn their attention to the effectiveness of followership within their organisations. The bottom-line impact can be massive.

Conclusion

The College for Adult Learning recognises the importance of Followership in HRM and, we have an extensive knowledge bank of experience and expertise to assist you in achieving a fully engaged workforce.

Contact CAL for more information.

Send us an email message at:
Email: admin@collegeforadultlearning.com.au

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About **Michael Meere**

Michael is a professional & academic in the field of human resources management (HRM). He is the CEO and founder of *Human Resources Business Partners HRBP* a worldwide business and HRM consultancy focusing on global human resources challenges and solutions. Michael is also a part-time prac-ademic (as he likes to refer to think of himself) supporting post graduate HR Masters students in their studies and research projects. He is known in the field as a speaker and writer on global HR trends and issues and more recently has developed a comprehensive set of HR metrics and measures designed for ease of use by busy HR practitioners. He is the author of over 50 articles and columns and has developed a large range of tools for HR professionals.

Michael is working in partnership with the College for Adult Learning to provide a range of consultancy services and specialised training development options for HRM Practitioners.