Chapter 6

The Essence of Followership:
Review of the Literature and Future Research Directions

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ABSTRACT

Followership is an emerging field of research in the current era. This chapter reviews followership literature and provides future research directions. This review is based on two theoretical frameworks of followership, namely role-based approach and constructionist approach. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a cursory review of followership research conducted in the last two decades. This chapter is a good starting point for novice researchers who want to pursue research in followership and leadership. In relations to future research directions, research topics that could be investigated in the light of leadership and followership are proposed.

INTRODUCTION

The world recognises Bill Gates, Elon Mask, Steve Jobs and many other industrial groves who has revolutionized world with their remarkable inventions like personal computers, Tesla motors, Space X, Apple I-phone and Mac Book. Apart

from industrial leaders the world also knows Abdul Sattar Edhi, Mother Teresa, Helen Keller who were philanthropists and social leaders of their time. But there is a question: what makes them great leaders besides their personal qualities like creativity, vision, and ambition? To answer this question Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen, (2008) argued that regardless of who is memorialized as founder, no organization or nation is built without the combined effort of a unsung yet enthusiastic groups of followers. Many academicians and practitioners confess that there is no leadership without followership or following behaviour. We know that behind the success of Tesla, Microsoft and Apple there is considerable and continuous efforts of many individuals. In spite of such importance little attention has been given to followership in leadership research in the past and the reason is followership has been correlated to demeaning and negative connotation like weak, passive and conforming. The second reason is the misconception that leadership is more important than followership (Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, & Morris, 2006). In recent times, followership has caught the attention of academics since Kelley's (1988) article, "In Praise of Followers" published in the Harvard Business Review and Challeff's (1995) book about courageous followers. According to Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, (2012) the process of leadership is co-created by the relational and social connections between individuals. Followership is deemed compulsory for leadership. Which means that for the leadership process, following behaviours is a vital component. Due to such importance of followership in leadership process this chapter is devoted to elaborate followership by reviewing followership literature under two main approaches (role-based approach and constructionist approach) of followership,

BACKGROUND

Kelley (1988), articulated that for organizational success not only leadership but followership is equally important. Chaleff's (1995) work about courageous followers also claimed that followers are not passive subordinates but active participants of the organization. Thus it has been known for a long time that followership and followers are important to leadership. However in spite of a large number of research studies on leadership in organizational studies (Yukl, 2012), less attention has been paid to followership (Bligh, 2011; Carsten et al., 2010; Kelley, 2008; Sy, 2010). The study of followers as an important part of the leadership process, through their approval of followership has been mostly missed in the literature of leadership. According to Uhl-Bien et al., (2014) the oversight of followership is due to in a large part to misunderstanding and confusion about the constructs of followership and how they relate to leadership. This confusion is due to the reason that we have

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