

The power of *We* in followership: strategies for followership development

Rachael Thompson, Stephanie Lynn Gresh and Marc Hurwitz

Editorial introduction

In this special issue of *Industrial and Commercial Training*, we focus on the importance of enabling collaborative followership practices within organizations and consider ways in which development and training can help to achieve and support this. There is a widely acknowledged disparity between leadership and followership studies, despite the two being so interconnected (Hollander, 1992; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2015). In academia, we see endless leadership-based publications, research and study opportunities. In practice, we see an emphasis on obtaining formal leadership positions and engaging in training opportunities to develop such skills. And yet, regrettably, the same cannot be said for followership despite the increasing body of research suggesting that followership has a critical impact on workplace relationships (Hopton, 2016; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2009a) and effectiveness (Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2015; Sy *et al.*, 2006). Without such opportunities to talk and relate to followership, the ability to develop followership training remains a difficult endeavour that few attempt. This issue will continue the conversation of followership within *Industrial and Commercial Training*, drawing on previously published papers that have provided insightful discussions around the need to enable followership to “flourish” (Bufalino, 2018, p.55) and those behaviours considered effective for followership (Manning and Robertson, 2016) and tools to do so (Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2009b).

Specifically, the papers included in this issue address the importance of followership and provide a range of theoretical developments – for instance, *Steinhoff* explores the ways in which followers vary their acceptance of leader power, *Hopton* considers the links between gender-role stereotypes and implicit followership theories, and *Peterson & Peterson*, in their two-part series, present findings from their study of organizational citizenship behaviour for followership. Through this, our issue advances empirical understandings of followership and provides a critical lens.

To broaden the field, this issue collates and shares followership practices across a range of contexts. *Armstrong* considers the approaches of coaches in developing healthy followership cultures and draws upon American Collegiate Athletics as illustrative examples. The ways in which followership cultures are changing are explored by *Bett*, in his focus on Kenyan school teachers, identifying their need to adapt their follower identities in light of shifting role expectations.

And finally, the issue provides insights into contemporary followership and leadership training programmes in practice to inspire the creation of new followership development initiatives. In his paper, *Read* shares reflections upon a decade of teaching followership within the military; *Finlayson et al* present tools to be used to develop and retain exemplary followers, and *Grant et al* share strategies to develop ongoing learning opportunities for followership within organizations.

Rachael Thompson is based at the Faculty of Business and Law, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Stephanie Lynn Gresh is based at Penn State University Park, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA. Marc Hurwitz is based at the Conrad School of Entrepreneurship and Business, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada.

Received 2 July 2020
Revised
Accepted 23 March 2021

This issue is based upon presentations given at the 1st Global Followership Conference (2019; Marc Hurwitz, Chair and Co-chairs Brent Bishop, Stephanie Colbry-Gresh, Samantha Hurwitz, Joan Owens, Rachael Thompson and Julia Zarina) which saw a gathering of over 130 academics and practitioners passionate to learn and share followership expertise. At the conference closing session, attendees identified several themes to focus on moving forward. The need to build and embed followership into education was foremost, and so we argue here for such education to continue into organizational contexts as ongoing training and development opportunities. Our issue, we hope, provides inspiration for individuals and organization to understand the importance of developing followership and, crucially, suggests how such training and development can be embraced and embedded in organizations.

References

- Bufalino, G. (2018), "Followership under the spotlight: implications for followership development", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 55-60.
- Hollander, E.P. (1992), "The essential interdependence of leadership and followership", *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 71-75.
- Hopton, C. (2016), "The double-edged sword of helping behaviour in leader-follower dyads", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 13-41.
- Hurwitz, M. and Hurwitz, S. (2009a), "The romance of the follower: part 1", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 80-86.
- Hurwitz, M. and Hurwitz, S. (2009b), "The romance of the follower: part 3", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 326-333.
- Hurwitz, M. and Hurwitz, S. (2015), *Leadership is Half the Story: A Fresh Look at Followership, Leadership, and Collaboration*, University of Toronto Press.
- Manning, T. and Robertson, B. (2016), "A three factor model of followership: part 1", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 48 No. 6, pp. 277-283.
- Sy, T., Tram, S. and O'Hara, L.A. (2006), "Relation of employee and manager emotional intelligence to job satisfaction and performance", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 68 No. 3, pp. 461-473.

Further reading

- Hurwitz, M. and Koonce, R. (2016), "The practice of followership: from theory to application", *Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 41-44.

Corresponding author

Marc Hurwitz can be contacted at: mhurwitz@uwaterloo.ca