
Leader Follower Interdependency: An Exploratory Study of Leadership and Followership in the Third Sector in Scotland

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Lorna Hunter, .Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, LHunter@qmu.ac.uk

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Abstract

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Research will be conducted at organisational level in the Third Sector but it is anticipated that lessons learned could be replicated in other contexts.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to share with conference early stage research that aims to explore and discover if an interdependent relationship can be evidenced between leaders and followers in Third Sector Organisations delivering healthcare services in Scotland and secondly; to receive feedback on how the focus of the study may be further developed.

Paper

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Key words: leadership, followership, interdependency, healthcare, Third Sector.

Introduction

In the Private, Public and Third Sectors there is a continuing call for improved leadership in organisations. A small number of high profile cases within health and social care have also highlighted examples of where leadership has failed despite innumerable leadership development programmes being initiated to address this within organisations. The Francis Report (2013), Darzi: NHS Next Stage Review (2008), and the Department of Health (2014) continue to keep the spotlight firmly focussed on leaders to build leadership capability at all levels in care delivery organisations to achieve results (Swenson et al. 2013).

This continuing focus on leaders and leadership may, in part, be due to a romanticism that implies leadership is the premier force in the scheme of organisational events and occurrences. As such the concept of leadership has assumed special status, achieving a heroic, larger than life value (Meindl and Ehrlich 1987). We have been conditioned over millennia to believe that leaders are heroes, often male, who are different from lesser mortals. Along with Baker (2007), Kellerman (2012): xiii) describes them as hero-leaders, gods and goddesses, to be respected and followed and as such will "fix" all ails of the organisations they lead. As implementation of leadership strategies often fail to make a difference, it may be more conducive for organisations to develop capability in followership skills or, at the very least, acknowledge the contribution followers make to meeting organisational goals. The strategy might be worth consideration as more often individuals find themselves in the position of follower rather than in the role of leader regardless of position or level of authority.

Little staff engagement, poor quality outcome measures, inconsistency in application and a general lack of agreement on deliverables are all signs (Porter-O'Grady 2013) of ineffective leadership. This is

borne out by Nolan (2013), who makes reference to situations where individuals at Mid Staffs attempted to make their voices heard. He describes a position where “an already poorly functioning Trust had become toxic, where whistle-blowing was discouraged and inaccurate report-writing was endemic”. It is suggested therefore by acknowledging, appreciating and taking cognisance of the constructive contribution followers could have made within that organisation some failings may have been prevented.

If the recommendations from the likes of the Francis Inquiry are to be effected then it is advocated that an improved understanding of leading and following is required. This as well as understanding how leader and follower behaviours are exhibited and to what degree a relationship or interdependence exists between the two. This may in turn lead to improved implementation of leadership and followership skills, subsequently achieving organisational goals.

Despite the fact there is a need to develop and evidence leadership capability in the sector, the focus of this study is to look at the relationships and dynamics between leaders and followers to determine how they work together in an interdependent manner to achieve organisational goals.

The aim is to identify if an interdependent relationship can be evidenced between leaders and followers in Third Sector Organisations delivering healthcare services in Scotland.

The key objectives are to:

- Establish if an interdependency exists between leaders and followers that can be evidenced
- Develop & test a model that encapsulates leader/follower independency to identify which would work best to capture data for qualitative analysis
- Explore the effect that leader/follower interdependence has on organisations in the Third Sector
- Identify how embracing a followership philosophy might effect and improve the delivery of health and social care.

Literature Review

i. Leaders and Leadership

We have been conditioned over millennia to believe that leaders are heroes, often male, who are different from lesser mortals. Kellerman (2012): xiii) describes them as hero-leaders, gods and goddesses, to be respected and followed. Leaders though, are not always heroes, often seen in the top level positions, but rather they are present at all levels within society and organisations, often overlooked because they don't fit the stereotype. Kellerman (2012) highlights fatal flaws in leaders that identify a counterpart to the hero-leader - the monster-leader. She describes this as “a hoarder of the general benefit and avid for the greedy rights of “my and mine”. According to Kellerman (2012) being a leader has become a mantra. She contends that:

“It is a presumed path to money and power; a medium for achievement, both individual and institutional; and a mechanism for creating change sometimes, though hardly always, for the common good.”

The evidence suggests that it is all those things and that all too often “leaders” are preoccupied with hierarchy and status rather than focussed on the change they are charged with implementing. The Francis Inquiry powerfully reminds us that the NHS is an organic institution, run by people for people, and like other organisations, it includes individuals, perhaps especially those in senior positions, who are irrational, ill-informed, self-deceiving and easily seduced by power, high salaries and prestige (Nolan 2013).

Becoming a leader, enacting leadership, is an amalgam of skills and abilities and takes practice. Daniel Goleman (1998) makes connections between emotional intelligence and business success where self-awareness, combines with the ability to evoke a positive emotional response in others to achieve the desired outcome. Hill’s (2010) premise is that people will become true followers without coercion, without doubt and without question because the leader has forged an emotional bond and made an emotional commitment to them.

ii. Following and Followership

The importance of followership means that good followers are ever more important in today’s organisations. Strong leadership is essential to ensure stability and success of healthcare systems (Gibbons and Bryant 2013), but just as critical is the value of followers in challenging this leadership. Followership is described as the response of people in lesser positions to those in higher-ranking ones and a social relationship exists between the leader, followers and the group. It is not submissive or passive compliance; rather it is a process where followers engage in constructive critical thinking, interacting with, and supporting, the leader to get the job done. Kelley (1992) Gibbons et al (2013) and Meilinger (2001) all agree that good followers are accountable for their actions and should accept responsibility whenever it is offered.

An early example of an identified need for followers can be found in the May 1932 edition of “Nation’s Business”, a monthly magazine published by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. The editor, Merle Thorpe (1932) wrote at the time that we should be indebted to Nelson Gaskill for a useful word:

“Gaskill advocates that “Leadership implies “followership” which means the capacity to understand and the willingness to accept the displacement of a prior concept by a new idea. Without this quality of “followership”, leadership fails as an inducement to concert of action. I am inclined to think that it is our extreme individualism which makes “followership” so difficult for the average business man (Is that because there are too many needs and wants to be satisfied by the leader?). The interdependence which specialisation creates is new. The idea of separate, antagonistic self-interest is old and deeply ingrained. It requires considerable intelligence of an individualistic business man to realise that his self-interest is dependent upon the degree to which a common interest is served. Many are incapable of it.”

Not only is it acknowledged that leadership and followership are both needed, but Gaskill recognises the interdependency between the two, i.e. reciprocity between the players; some give and take; interconnectedness.

Since the 1930's a developing interest in followers has come about. Robert Kelley though wrote in depth about followership in 1988, and subsequently more articles, papers and books have been written and published as the topic has become more prominent. The main authors are tabled below:

Table 1: Principle writers

Writers	Year	Book / article
James Meindl	1985	Romancing Leadership
Robert Kelley	1988	In Praise of Followers
Robert Kelley	1992	The Power of Followership
Barbara Kellerman	2008	Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders
Ronald Riggio, Ira Chaleff, & Jean Lipman-Blumen	2008	The Art of Followership
Ira Chaleff	2009	The Courageous Follower
Barbara Kellerman	2012	The End of Leadership
Emmanuel Gobillot	2013	Follow the leader: The one thing great leaders have that great followers want.

Followers, Kellerman (2004), says are getting bolder and more strategic and are every bit as important as leaders in the success of organisations. By challenging the status quo, questioning historical practices or decisions that take organisations away from their strategic intent, they are embracing and accepting responsibility, empowering themselves, eagerly contributing to change the dynamic of the organisation. They are attempting to do what their leaders, as they see it, are not doing to meet objectives.

Chaleff (2009) examines followership and suggests that “working to sustain the courage requires honesty in relationships with leaders so they can be told what they need to hear”. All the above proponents of followership agree that it takes courage to challenge the leader; partnership and respect are required as well as trust and honesty.

iii. Followership theories

The significance of following for leadership means that understanding leadership is incomplete without an understanding of followership. For research in followership to advance, followership constructs need to be identified and placed in the context of followership theory.

According to Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) followership theory is the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process. This means that the paradigm of followership includes a follower role (a position in relation to leaders), following behaviours (in relation to leaders), and outcomes associated with the leadership process. If adopting a constructionist (process) approach, it involves consideration of the co-constructed nature of the leadership process. Collinson, (2006), DeRue and Ashford (2010) concur. This is not general employee behaviour and means the term follower is not the same as employee.

iv. Dependency, co-dependency and interdependency

The initial focus of the research proposal was on leaders and followers and their behaviours, how they interact and how they might be co-dependent, however preliminary reading of the literature has given rise to reconsidering the term co-dependent. Co-dependency is a term that was drawn up in the mid 1980's to describe a range of behaviours displayed by individuals that appeared to be correlated to the fact that their spouse/ partner had an addiction i.e. "rooted in the model of a co-alcoholic wife, it's commonly associated with compulsive caretaking" (Lancer 2012). As such there has been a shift in focus to explore the terms dependency, and interdependency within the context of leader follower relationships.

v. Dependency

For the purposes of this study, dependency will be defined in two ways:

1. as the relationship between conditions, events, or tasks such that one cannot begin or be completed until one or more other conditions, events, or tasks have occurred, begun, or completed (Luthra 2011)
2. a state of needing something or someone (Stevenson 2010).

The two definitions offer an insight into the relationship between two or more conditions, events or tasks, or in the case of this study, individuals or organisational groups. For example, it is assumed that generally 'leaders' in organisations determine strategic direction to meet corporate objectives but are they dependant on their 'followers' to complete tasks and functions before the goals can be met.

Equally 'followers' are dependent on, and need their 'leaders' to determine the course of action to take in order to meet corporate goals. Simmons (2009) suggests that dependent followers do their jobs but their learned patterns of power and authority keep them from providing issue focused suggestions, challenge, and opposition to their leaders. Dependent followers believe and behave as if "you are the leader, I'm not". This chimes with Kelley's (1992) premise that some followers are just sheep or yes-people.

vi. Interdependency

Interdependence can be described as a relationship in which each member is mutually dependent on the others (The Free Dictionary 1991-2003.). Participants may be emotionally, economically, ecologically and/ or morally reliant on/and responsible to each other. In respect of organisations, Thompson (2003) defines three types of interdependence to describe the intensity of interactions and behaviours within organisational structures i.e. pooled, sequential and reciprocal. According to Murray (2012), Thompson theorised that to get individuals to work together effectively, the respective work tasks need to be structured by the intensity of interdependence.

An initial review of the literature suggests that leaders and followers are inextricably linked (Kelley 1992, Chaleff 2009, VanVactor 2012, Tjosvold 1989, Eberly and Fong 2013, Kean et al. 2011, Kean and Haycock-Stuart 2011, Kellerman 2008) but what is not so clear is whether there is evidence of an interdependent relationship. Interdependent followers come forward with suggestions about what they can do to help improve the processes that govern their jobs, challenge the leader to improve ineffective policies and procedures, and dissent when the leader's behaviour violates the shared purpose" (Simmons 2009).

vii. Healthcare Sector Landscape in Scotland

When the Scottish Government (2011) laid out its 2020 Vision, it set out its intent to have a healthcare system by 2020 where everyone is able to live longer healthier lives at home, or in a homely setting. The vision included putting leadership at the heart of service delivery for people with health and social care needs to ensure shared ownership of the challenges and solutions.

The Scottish Government's national agenda for health and social care places increasing emphasis on the role of the Third Sector. This changing policy environment is both an opportunity and a challenge; the tough financial climate is biting hard so survival has become a real issue for many organisations. Paring back operations to the minimum to cope with cuts severely inhibits them from investing in leadership development, although this is what they crucially need if they are to survive and thrive. Even quite sophisticated Third Sector providers struggle with the challenge of partnership working with statutory health bodies and have highlighted a desire for training and support to help them address this deficit.

When addressing "the Gathering" Alex Salmond, MSP (2014), described the Third Sector in Scotland as having "45,000 organisations, 130,000 employees, and more than a million volunteers all whom are central to the wellbeing of communities across the country". Most are small and community based, working in just one or two localities. Largely working in ways that can be characterised as preventative; seeking to improve the wellbeing of people in their own homes and communities. They provide support and services to some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland.

viii. The Third Sector in Health and Social Care Delivery

At a macro level the Scottish Government's national agenda for health and social care places an increasing emphasis on the role of the Third Sector and Ministers view the Third Sector as a key player in transforming public services as it shifts towards prevention and early intervention. Small voluntary organisations though, frequently lack the leadership and partnership working skills (Hopkins 2010) that would enable them to engage with the public sector more strategically, whether in an influencing role or a service delivery basis. Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS), supported by Scottish Government and NHS Health Scotland, has responded to this identified need and has already set in train a leadership programme to build leadership capacity, capability and competence in these types of organisations.

Emergent themes

The recurring themes emanating from the literature suggest that trust, reciprocity, emotional intelligence, partnership, shared goals, follower and leader behaviours all evoke a positive emotional response in others in achieving desired outcomes. Kellerman's suggestion that followers are getting bolder, more strategic and are every bit as important as leaders sits easily with Kelley's (1992) premise that followers engage in constructive critical thinking, interacting with, and supporting, the leader to get the job done.

When describing Organisational Solidarity (OS), Koster and Sanders (2006) explain that "solidarity refers to individual contributions to the common good" and "that it involves at least two people who can choose to co-operate or not". They also allude to social exchange theorists who regard "co-operation in social relationships to be based on the norm of reciprocity". Which means that co-operative behaviour of one, will be responded to by a co-operative move of the other. However co-operation doesn't often come about in short term relationships and it likely that only through time, trust builds for the co-operative and reciprocal behaviours to emerge.

This suggests with trust and co-operation, the intensity of interactions and behaviours within organisational structures begin to indicate that followers, in being honest in their relationships with leaders feel more confident to tell their leaders what they need to hear. According to Sanders and Schyns (2006), little empirical work has been carried out on reciprocity in manager-subordinate relationships that might explain trust and co-operation. Further exploration of the reciprocity phenomenon in this study may go some way to underpinning evidence for interdependence.

Research Methodology

The general approach to the research is to spend an initial period reading, exploring, understanding and developing the background theory as it applies to the research topic; i.e. leaders, followers and relationships through the lens of interdependence.

This will allow time for thinking and theory building which will lead to a focus on how the background theory can be applied to the Third Sector i.e. what does leader/follower interdependence look like? It is anticipated that this will identify gaps in the current literature, and it

will be these gaps that will further fine-tune the research question, as well as identify the most suitable method to answer it.

The researcher has identified that no single philosophy will be adopted; rather it is likely to be multi-dimensional. This may involve elements of pragmatism, where it is recognised that there may be multiple realities rather than a single point of view to provide a complete picture (Saunders et al. 2012). With this in mind, consideration is still being given to which methodology would be most appropriate to capture the views, attitudes and behaviours of the study subjects.

i. Research Strategy

According to Saunders et al (2012), taking a subjectivism approach where the philosophy holds that social phenomenon (organisations), are created through the perceptions and consequent actions of affected social players (followers), rather than an objectivism approach where social entities (management structures) exist as a meaningful reality external to those social actors (followers). In other words objectivism emphasises the structure of organisations where job descriptions, operating procedures and reporting hierarchies are there for followers to adhere to; subjectivism, conversely, is where the structures and hierarchies are less important than the way followers attach individual meanings to their jobs and the way they believe those jobs should be performed.

Subjectivism is often associated with social constructivism which aims to understand the rules people use to make sense of the world by investigating people's perceptions of the world (Sekaran and Bougie 2013), and how people's views result from interactions with others within the context in which they take place. Differing interpretations of the world are likely to affect the actions of individuals and their social interactions with others (Saunders et al. 2012). Social constructivism implies that meanings are dependent on individual's interpretation of events around them; therefore qualitative data collected will be open to ambiguity and complexity and will require sensitive analysis.

ii. Research Approach

The intention is to use a mixed method approach, firstly to tease out the complexities of the leadership/followership dynamic within several organisations by making use of a questionnaire. Crossman and Crossman (2011) suggest that to develop and further explore the connections between leadership and followership a modified Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) could be used. The MLQ was developed by Bass (1985) and measures a broad range of leadership types from passive leaders to those who transform their followers into becoming leaders themselves.. Further exploration of this approach is currently being undertaken, but it is anticipated that initial analysis of findings will provide an indication of whether is possible to evidence interdependence.

Following on from the questionnaire, a single organisation will be identified in order that the researcher can become immersed in the inner workings of the organisation and emerge with a credibly authentic account of participants' behaviour and beliefs. Harrington (2002) describes ethnography as a research method that relies heavily on the personal experiences and perceptions

of individual researchers (Stewart 2002, Clifford 2002) and as such this method may well lend itself to capturing the perspectives of the research subjects. Making ethnography credible depends on walking a fine line between participation and observation; being immersed enough to know what you're talking about while being separate enough to offer a critical analysis i.e. should the researcher become 'native in the tribe or stranger in the midst?'. This is one of the trade-offs that characterise most forms of social scientific inquiry (Weick 2002).

Having given consideration to other methods and approaches such as a postpositivist view where the method lends itself more easily to experimental type studies such as cause and effect. It would be unethical to ask a research subject to carry out a specific task (cause) and record the outcome (effect) it has on an organisation. What does sit more comfortably is the social constructionist view; seeking out views and meaning from observation and open ended questioning and as such is the methodology of choice for this study.

iii. Research Design

By using an MLQ and an ethnographic based approach to observe behaviours, and focussing on the meaning that participants hold about the problem or issue (Creswell 2014), it is anticipated that good qualitative data will be collected. As the researcher in the field is the key instrument it will be important to reflect on how the researcher's role, thoughts and beliefs shapes the research, which may lead to emergent design/redesign of the study. Managing and developing a complex picture of the issue is challenging, as is taking a holistic view of the multiple perspectives to draw an even larger picture as the research unfolds.

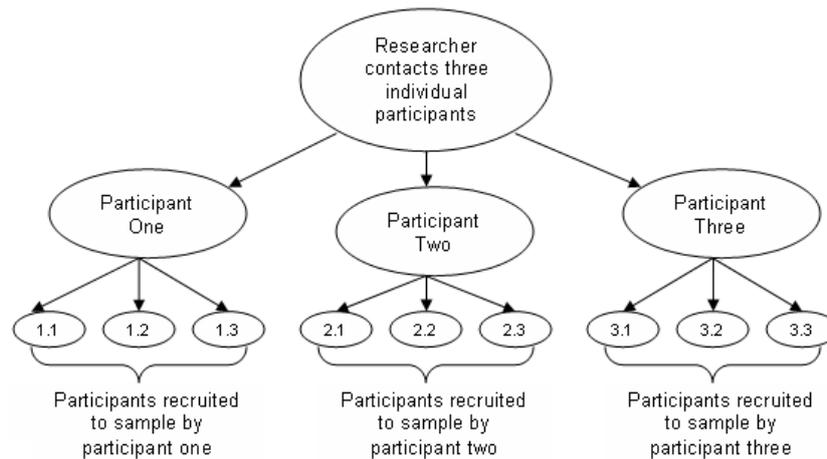
iv. Research population

Having considered the various approaches to sampling suggested by Saunders et al. (2012), the indication is that non-probability sampling is the option of choice for business research. As the likely focus will be on a small number of organisations, sample size will be important to gain real insights into organisational behaviour. For the MLQ, the sample size is likely to be around 35-36.

To get these sorts of numbers snowball sampling may provide a method to reach sufficient numbers. It would mean that only a few organisations would need to be approached in order to gain access and approval to undertake the study. The risk of this approach is that those proposing others are likely to recommend others similar to themselves and in so doing introduce an element of bias.

The intended participants will be adults aged over 18 years, recruited from Third Sector Organisations e.g. Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, Epilepsy Scotland, Headway, Macmillan Cancer Relief etc.

Figure 1: Example of a snowball sample



Source:<http://www.hsrmethods.org/Glossary/Terms/S/~media/Images/Figures/Snow%20Ball%20Sampling%20Image%205.ashx>

v. Data Collection

Initial primary qualitative data will be collected by using an adapted multi-sited MLQ. Subsequently working with one organisation, individuals behaviours will be observed and will facilitate the gathering of opinions. By combining observational techniques with subsequent open-ended and semi-structured interviews, it is anticipated that opportunities will arise to explore and interpret the leader/follower dynamic within organisations. Secondary data will be collected by means of ongoing literature review to inform the study, linking the outputs of the research to leadership/followership and dependency/relationship models.

vi. Data collation and storage.

All data collected will be anonymised and coded, names being replaced with a participant number so that individuals cannot be identified in any reporting of the data. Collected data will be kept on a personal computer that is password-protected to which only I have access. In addition data will be held in my password-protected file area on the Queen Margaret University computer server for backup purposes. Data will be kept until the research study has been completed, after which all data that could identify individuals will be destroyed.

vii. Data Analysis

Saunders et al. (2012) propose that qualitative research “is often associated with an interpretive philosophy because researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed by those taking part in the research”. They suggest meanings are dependent on individuals’ understanding of the events occurring around them. Therefore for interpretation, analysis and understanding of the data there is a need to be mindful of real or inferred meaning(s).

In order to explore, analyse, synthesise and transform the data, it will be summarised and categorised into groups according to themes so linking the research question and objectives.

viii. Ethical considerations

As the researcher will be external to the organisations being studied it will be necessary to obtain permission to access staff to collect data. Support from CEOs will be sought in order that approval is granted to proceed. Consideration will need to be given to the role of not only the researcher, but participants, i.e. what they themselves bring to the study by way of bias/ values/ and personal background that might shape interpretation of the data.

ix. Data considerations

As part of the questionnaire, observational study and interview preamble, it will be made clear to organisations, and interviewees, that all data will be treated as confidential as participants need to feel sufficiently comfortable in order to express their views honestly, without fear of any repercussions. Once data is recorded and transcribed, raw data will subsequently be destroyed; leaving only key themes and analyses.

Research limitations

As with any piece of work, this study faces some limitations and constraints due to time and resource restrictions. The size and make-up of the sample under study will be critical in order to get sufficient representation and responses to analyse so themes and concepts can be constructed. Access to the research settings and participants will need to be negotiated. It is acknowledged some organisations identified will be reluctant to participate in the study due to concerns about confidentiality and ethics. All steps will be taken to reassure participating organisations that confidentiality is paramount and should it be required ethical approval will be sought.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to identify if an interdependent relationship can be evidenced between leaders and followers in Third Sector Organisations delivering healthcare services in Scotland.

Despite the fact there is a need to develop and evidence leadership capability in the sector, the focus of this study is to look at the relationships and dynamics between leaders and followers to determine how they work together in an interdependent manner to achieve organisational goals.

From reading Küpers and Weibler (2008) it is becoming ever more important to understand leadership and leader-follower as an integral function. To practice integral leadership, they suggest, requires further research to gain a deeper comprehension of the role of personal,

interpersonal sociocultural and systemic interrelations in organisations. It is to that deeper understanding this study aims to make a small contribution.

It is expected that the research will contribute not only to academic literature but also provide a contribution to those building leadership and followership capability in the sector. Additionally it is anticipated that lessons learned could be replicated in other contexts and that at a higher level, leader/follower interdependence between the Third Sector and the Public Sector could be evidenced over time.

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