

## Leadership, Followership and Dyadic Role Making: A Review

**Ekpen T. Owie**

Principal Consultant  
Bodleian Houghton and Fields  
United Kingdom  
ekpenowie@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Effective leadership and followership are essential for organizational success. Leveraging both leadership and followership contributions can improve organizational outcomes. The dyadic interactions between leaders and followers help shape role making and role clarity. The theory of leader-member exchange contributes to understanding the dyadic relationships and the reciprocity involved. Thus, an understanding of the mutuality of the leader and member in a relationship is essential for achieving positive outcomes. In this paper, I examined the nature of leadership, management, followership, and the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers.

**Keywords:** Leadership, followership, management, dyadic

---

### Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

Ekpen T. Owie (2017): Leadership, Followership and Dyadic Role Making: A Review  
Advances in Multidisciplinary & Scientific Research Journal. Vol. 3. No.3, Pp21-24

### 1. THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP, DYADIC ROLE MAKING, AND FOLLOWERSHIP

The topic of leadership is essential in the world today given the significant roles leaders play in organizations. According to Yammarino (2013), leadership is the channel through which targets are accomplished, making the topic of leadership in organizational sciences the most researched and debated. Similarly, leadership is a very important topic because the financial and physiological successes of stakeholders are achieved through good leadership that fosters collective efforts (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). In other words, through good leadership, organizational effectiveness is achieved. The antecedents of leadership can sometimes misconstrue the essence of management to be secondary. In other words, leadership is superior to management since leadership gets things done in situations where typical management cognition fails. However, as Kotter (2001) pointed out, leadership just like management presents unique as well as complementary characteristics necessary for organizational success.

The topic of leadership in today's world is not discussed in isolation. According to Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009), the current leadership field examines leadership from not just a leader's perspective but a broader spectrum of followers, supervisors, peers and so on. Followership is also an important aspect of leadership as leaders rely on followers to implement the vision. The dyadic interaction between leaders and followers produce its dynamics and associated challenges. Given the power bases of leaders and the disposition to the various influence tactics at their disposal, how do they shape the dyadic relationship? A leader may choose to adopt a group or individual-focused approach with either approach having its consequences depending on the situation. In this paper, I examined leadership and management, followership and the dyadic relationship between leaders and subordinates.

### 2. LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND FOLLOWERSHIP

Leadership is about taking control of situations and getting others to follow. According to Hogan and Kaiser (2005), leadership is a focal topic in human sciences and involves spearheading a collective approach to problem-solving for organizational success. Leadership inspires for innovation (Brown, 2010) and provides direction in the midst of change (Kotter, 1996). In other words, leadership fosters the idea of the bigger picture and sets the tone for adapting to change. Management is about coordinating the different operating units of the organization towards achieving set goals. According to Kotter (1996), "Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly" (p. 25). Thus, management is an important aspect of organizational survival. As Hamel (2009) pointed out, management is one of the most important discoveries of humanity given how management processes and structures have driven economic progress over time.

Although leadership and management are different, they are both part of the organizational processes and dynamics for effectiveness and success. As Kotter (2001) noted, leadership and management both have distinctive and complementary functions and characteristics needed for organizational success. According to Kotter (2001), management deals with complexity, planning, goal setting, monitoring, and controlling while leadership handles change, sets visions, motivates, and inspires. Given these clear distinctions, organizations need both leaders and managers to function effectively. Thus, the implication for organizations is to strike a balance between effective leadership and management for success.

Leaders drive the leadership process. Effective leaders inspire and mentor others to enhance organizational performance (Barrett, 2011) as well as envisioning a new direction, aligning, and energizing others (followers) to remain focused on the change path (Kotter, 2001). To this end, the people who leaders guide (followers) become relevant in the discussion. As Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) pointed out, "today, the field of leadership focuses not only on the leader, but also on followers, peers, supervisors, work setting/context, and culture..." (p. 422). In other words, the current leadership discourse is not about just the leader anymore but a holistic approach towards leadership, followership, and the dynamic relationships that exist between them. Rost (2008) described a follower as anyone who follows. According to Crossman and Crossman (2011), followers have historically been referred to as subordinates and until recently as participants or collaborators. The concept of followership over the years has been elaborated based on its relationship to leadership (Crossman & Crossman, 2011) and connotes the process of following (Rost, 2008). As Yung and Tsai (2013) noted, followership reflects leadership; as a result, followers shape the existence of leaders. Wortman (as cited in Crossman & Crossman, 2011) defined followership as

The process of attaining one's individual goals by being influenced by a leader into participating in individual or group efforts toward organizational goals in a given situation. Followership thereby becomes seen as a function of the follower, the leader, and situational variables. (p. 483). These descriptions of followership convey the idea of a relationship between leaders and followers. These relationships that are dyadic in nature and are referred to as leader-member exchange (LMX), shape followership attitudes and organizational performances (Tangirala, Green, & Ramanujam, 2007). Yammarino, (2013) defined leadership as Leadership is a multi-level (person, dyad, group, collective) leader-follower interaction process that occurs in a particular situation (context) where a leader (e.g., superior, supervisor) and followers (e.g., subordinates, direct reports) share a purpose (vision, mission) and jointly accomplish things (e.g., goals, objectives, tasks) willingly (e.g., without coercion). (p. 150). Yammarino's (2013) definition of leadership conceptualizes the leader-member exchange (LMX) dynamics that will be discussed further in this paper. Effective followership engenders effective leadership and organizational outcomes (Agho, 2009). As Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) pointed out, LMX places emphasis on the leader and follower dyadic interactions. Thus, leadership and followership are intertwined.

### 3. DYADIC ROLE MAKING

Dyadic conceptualizes how two people interact. According to Tse and Ashkanasy (2015), a one-on-one relationship signifies the distinctiveness of the dyadic concept. Thus, dyads drive interactions that result in relationships (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). These interactions and relationships are interpersonal and cut across spectrums. Liden, Anand, and Vidyarathi (2016) noted that dyadic relationship encompasses a broad range of topic related to organizational studies such as leadership and social networks. Tse and Ashkanasy (2015) argued that such broad categorization of the concept of the dyadic relationship has diluted the core understanding of how individuals or groups in a dyad act towards one another and enhance the relationship. In other words, the essence of dyadic (one-on-one) relationships should not be undermined with such broad categorizations. Relationships exist in organizations between superiors and subordinates, superiors and superiors, and subordinates and subordinates.

According to Liden, Anand, and Vidyarathi (2016), "dyadic relationships are pervasive in organizations, taking multiple forms, such as leader-follower, mentor-protégé, teammate-teammate, and coworker-coworker relationships" (p. 140). These relationships in organizations occur through dyadic interactions within complex organizational dynamics, making dyadic relationships crucial (Liden, Anand, & Vidyarathi, 2016). Thus, dyadic relationships are necessary for organizational effectiveness. Dyadic relationships do not begin out of obscurity. According to Liden, Anand, and Vidyarathi (2016), the perception process sets the tone for all dyadic relationships followed by an attraction based on which the new interaction begins. In other words, a dyadic relationship begins with how an individual or entity perceives another from which attraction is developed, leading to a relationship.

These developments of new relationships bring about the aspect of role making and role taking for the dyadic entities (Katz & Kahn as cited in Liden, Anand, & Vidyarthi, 2016). Looking at role making from an organizational standpoint, the role making theory states "that organizational roles are ill-defined; therefore, individuals must negotiate and clarify roles through interactions (exchanges) between members (Graen as cited in Korte, 2009). The role making through routinization further strengthens the dyadic relationship (Liden, Anand, & Vidyarthi, 2016). Consequently, the role making dynamic is made profound in the leader-member exchange.

#### **4. LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE (LMX)**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) connotes the interactions between parties. According to Tangirala, Green, and Ramanujam (2007), LMX underscores the dyadic relationship between employees and their supervisors. LMX theory is an aspect of social exchange theory that espouses the process of role making through the interactions of a leader and subordinates (Korte, 2009). There is also the aspect of role making theory that is associated with LMX. As Kauppila, (2014) pointed out, the role making theory element of LMX implies LMX can further clarify roles. In other words, the interaction between the leader and member not only delineates but explains roles too.

Various scholars have examined how the member outcomes perspective of leader-member exchange (LMX) are shaped by trust, leadership attribution, and style that affect the quality of LMX and consequently overall organizational outcome. Scandura and Pellegrini (2008), in their study, found out that trust plays a significant role in achieving high-quality LMX. Scandura and Pellegrini (2008) further noted that high-quality LMX mediated by trust is still vulnerable to degenerate to low-quality LMX. Therefore, leaders must sustain the trust levels to keep LMX quality high as members continuously assess their levels of trust towards leaders that can result in low-quality LMX, negative member attitudes, and thus, poor organizational outcomes.

The way leaders influence members shape the quality of the LMX as well. Wu, Tsui, and Kinicki (2010) revealed from their study that a group focused transformational leadership approach can enhance group effectiveness while individual-focused approach results in high individual efficacy but reduced group effectiveness. Therefore, leaders must ensure their approach does not convey individual biases that create divisions among members and thus, result in limited group performances. A leader's cognitive attribution can affect their perception of members' behaviors as well. Although Lam, Huang, and Snape's (2007) study supported the notion that feedback-seeking behaviors of members improve leader-member exchange (LMX), they also found out that the positive impact is dependent on the leader's interpretation of members feedback as performance driven. Thus, if the leader construes the member's behavior as impression driven, the quality of the LMX is negatively impacted. Overall, the leader has a significant role to play regarding the leader-member exchange. As Agho (2009) posited, effective followers should be developed for organizational effectiveness.

In contrast, other scholars have also countered these member-focused positions as discussed above. Liden, Anand, and Vidyarthi, (2016) noted that the reciprocal exchange between entities is what dyadic relationship is all about and that the focus on just one entity does not advance the understanding of mutuality. Wilson, Sin, and Conlon (2010) with the use of role and implicit leadership theory elaborated on the resources leader can gain in the LMX relationship. The ramification is that members also need to understand resources that leaders need in the reciprocal exchanges.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Leaders and followers both play important roles in organizational success. Leaders do not operate in isolation. It is imperative that the organizational stakeholders see followership as an element of successful leadership. The leader and follower interaction is an example of a dyadic relationship that exists in the organization. Through such dyadic interactions, roles are clarified and made. The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory accentuates the dyadic relationship between leaders and members. LMX helps to explore the leader and member relationship with a focus on member outcomes of the dyadic interaction and the need to harness the relationship for overall organizational success. Therefore, it is important that leaders and followers understand this dyadic flow to manage the reciprocal expectations from both parties effectively.

## REFERENCES

1. Agho, A. O. (2009). Perspectives of senior-level executives on effective followership and leadership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 16(2), 159-166.
2. doi: 10.1177/1548051809335360
3. Avolio, B. J., Walumbwa, F. O., & Weber, T. J. (2009). Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 421-449. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163621
4. Barrett, J. D. (2011). *Leadership Communication* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill
5. Brown, J. (2010, January 1). Leadership vs. management. *Supply House Times*. Retrieved from [www.supplyht.com/](http://www.supplyht.com/)
6. Crossman, B., & Crossman, J. (2011). Conceptualising followership—a review of the literature. *Leadership*, 7(4), 481-497. doi: 10.1177/1742715011416891
7. Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The leadership quarterly*, 6(2), 219-247. doi:10.1016/1048-9843(95)90036-5
8. Hamel, G. (2009, February). Moonshots for management. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(2), 91–98. Retrieved from [www.hbr.org/](http://www.hbr.org/)
9. Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2005). What we know about leadership. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 169-180. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.169
10. Hogan, R., Curphy, G. J., & Hogan, J. (1994). What we know about leadership: Effectiveness and personality. *American Psychologist*, 49(6), 493-504. doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.49.6.493
11. Kauppila, O. P. (2014). So, what am I supposed to do? A multilevel examination of role clarity. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(5), 737-763. doi: 10.1111/joms.12042
12. Kenny, D. A., Kashy, D. A., Cook, W. L. (2006). *Dyadic data analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press
13. Korte, R. F. (2009). How newcomers learn the social norms of an organization: A case study of the socialization of newly hired engineers. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 20(3), 285-306. doi: 10.1002/hrdq.20016
14. Kotter, J. P. (2001). What leaders really do. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(11), 85-96. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org>
15. Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
16. Lam, W., Huang, X., & Snape, E. (2007). Feedback-seeking behavior and leader-member exchange: Do supervisor-attributed motives matter? *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(2), 348-363. doi: 10.5465/AMJ.2007.24634440
17. Liden, R. C., Anand, S., & Vidyarthi, P. (2016). Dyadic Relationships. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, 139-166. doi: 10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062452
18. Rost, J. (2008). Followership: An outmoded concept. In R. E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, & J.
19. Lipman-Blumen (Eds.), *The art of followership* (pp. 53-64). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
20. Scandura, T. A., & Pellegrini, E. K. (2008). Trust and leader-member exchange: A closer look at relational vulnerability. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 15(2), 101-110. doi:10.1177/1548051808320986
21. Tangirala, S., Green, S. G., & Ramanujam, R. (2007). In the shadow of the boss's boss: Effects of supervisors' upward exchange relationships on employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(2), 309-320. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.92.2.309
22. Tse, H. H., & Ashkanasy, N. M. (2015). The dyadic level of conceptualization and analysis: A missing link in multilevel OB research?. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(8), 1176-1180. doi: 10.1002/job.2010
23. Wilson, K. S., Sin, H., & Conlon, D. E. (2010). What about the leader in leader-member exchange? The impact of resource exchanges and substitutability on the leader. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(5), 358-372. doi: 10.5465/AMR.2010.51141654
24. Wu, J. B., Tsui, A. S., & Kinicki, A. J. (2010). Consequences of differentiated leadership in groups. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(1), 90-106. doi:10.5465/AMJ.2010.48037079
25. Yammarino, F. (2013). Leadership: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 20(2), 149-155. doi: 10.1177/1548051812471559
26. Yung, C. T., & Tsai, K. C. (2013). Followership: An Important Partner of Leadership. *Business and Management Horizons*, 1(2), 47 – 55. doi: 10.5296/bmh.v1i2.4233