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The influence of follower orientation on follower behaviour in the leadership process

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Orientation: Whilst extensive literature is available on leadership, followership is under-researched. This study, therefore, pays attention to specific follower behaviours that can influence the leadership process and follower behaviours that are passive.

Research purpose: This study offers deeper insights into followership behaviours and their influence on the leadership process.

Motivation for the study: By extending the original research in China of Carsten, Uhl-Bien and Huang on followership, the current study endeavours to apply these existing scales in a different cultural setting. The study investigated the relationship between followers' orientation, namely proactively identifying problems or passive role orientation and their voice behaviour and upward delegation.

Research approach/design and method: Primary data on followership orientation and behaviour were gathered from 287 surveyed respondents across different industries in South Africa, correlation tests and multiple regression methods were used.

Main findings: The results show that the perception of followers that they need to proactively identify problems (co-production orientation) is positively associated with the tendency of followers to communicate their opinions on work issues. The perception of followers that they do not need to be involved in decision-making is negatively associated with voice behaviour.

Practical/managerial implications: Managers and human resources professionals should consider assessing employees' followership orientation during recruitment and selection. Employee development programmes should also focus on reorienting employees towards constructive followership, characterised by co-creation of solutions, which actively contributes towards effective leadership processes.

Contribution/value addition: This study spanned across industries and uniquely shows the importance of role orientation of followers and how the traditional approach of focusing on leadership development might have negatively influenced followers' perception of their roles.

Keywords: leadership; followership; co-production; passive role orientation; voice behaviour; upward delegation.

Introduction

In their critique of the theoretical foundation for the leader–follower relationship, Gottfredson, Wright and Heaphy (2020) recommend a deeper understanding of the dynamics of followership in this relationship. Although Bastardoz and Van Vugt (2019, p. 81) maintain that 'it is a truism that there can be no leaders without followers', the concept of followership has not been sufficiently explored in the literature. In the bi-directional relationship between leader and follower, the role played by the latter must not be understated. Morris (2012) laments that the followership domain remains overshadowed by the leadership field. Similar to Morris' (2012) orientation, the current study adopts a follower-focused approach to ensure that followers are the central focus of the study, both theoretically and methodologically. In contrast to studies that considered followers from the perspective of leaders, this study explores what followers believe about followers and their behaviours, aligned to a recent South African study by Matshoba-Ramuedzisi (2021).

As businesses and organisations evolve, traditional methods of thinking are being questioned. In the past, change practitioners, leaders and even followers believed that strong leadership

was needed to accomplish organisational goals (Cummings, Worley, & Donovan, 2020). Organisational success, however, is now thought to be based on interconnected units that involve all parts of the organisation, including followers (Junker & Van Dick, 2014). Although leadership has a significant role to play in the performance of formal and informal organisations (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018), followership and its associated behaviours require further research (Acquaah, Zoogah, & Kwesiga, 2013; Andert, Platt, & Alexakis, 2011; Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010). Specifically, studies need to inquire into traits or motivations that may influence effective followership. Insight into followership could benefit the design of the costly leadership development programmes in organisations, which could enhance the return on investment from these programmes.

Followership is generally defined in two ways in the literature. Firstly, it is defined in terms of a rank, role, or position perspective, using the role theory approach (Biddle, 1986). This includes manager-subordinate relationships, or leader-follower relationships in the context of business, called organisational role theory (Wickham & Parker, 2007). Roles create specific expectations for employees' own behaviours and those of others. Role theory in the organisational context refers to social systems that are task-oriented and hierarchical.

Secondly, an alternative to the organisational role theory approach is the social constructionist approach to followership (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). According to this approach, followership is an interaction that creates leadership by combined acts of leading and following. Lührmann and Eberl (2007) state that leadership is relational, a social phenomenon resulting from leader–follower interactions. The leadership process is thus defined as the interaction between leader and follower, during which outcomes are generated. Acquaah et al. (2013, p. 171) advise that 'African culture is heavily leader-centric but recognizes the indispensable role of followers in effectuating leadership. Yet, we lack models of effective followership'. Matshoba-Ramuedzisi (2021) summarises these perspectives on followership and highlights that a follower-centric perspective acknowledges followers as social constructors of leadership.

By focussing on the question: *What leads followers to exhibit constructive behaviours?*, the present study contributes to the body of knowledge by deepening the understanding of the antecedents to follower behaviours in leader–follower relationships. It looks beyond the impact of leadership on follower outcomes because the perspective that organisational outcomes are solely the function of leadership is limited. Aligned with Shamir's (2007) aim to understand the deeper roots of followership in the leadership process (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). During research for this study, using digital tools such as Google Scholar, searches for *followership* showed approximately 23 500 results, whereas those for *leadership* showed 3 950 000 results. This points to an abundance of

research around leadership but not enough into the significance of followership. Understanding follower contributions to leadership is, thus, a worthwhile area of focus for this study. The current study, thus, seeks to contribute to the theory development in followership research by extending the work of Carsten, Uhl-Bien and Huang (2017). The original study draws on role theory to operationalise the study in dyads of managers and subordinates.

The study of Carsten et al. (2017) was carried out in China, and the researchers observed that they saw no reason why the organisational context of their study should be different from international organisations. They did, however, point out the potential for cultural differences. These environmental or contextual differences between the original study and the present study might offer a unique contribution. We applied the study by Carsten et al. (2017) in a South African environment to offer evidence of followership in this unique cultural context that differs from that in China in terms of China having higher power distance than the general South African population (See GLOBE study in House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2011). In conducting this research on the African continent, we wish to contribute to the growing body of knowledge by African scholars, in accordance with the observations of Nkomo (2011), Lerutla and Steyn (2021), Vilakati and Schurink (2021) and Sanda (2017) that leadership studies were predominantly conducted in Europe and the Americas, which raise arguments as to whether their assumptions hold true for those leaders (and followers) operating in the African firm environment.

Literature review
Leadership and followership

Dinh et al. (2014) state that the topic of leadership has generated diverse theories as an outcome of the increase in scholarly research over the last decade. The discussion now illustrates this diversity: Sanda and Arthur (2017) refer to the complexity of the leadership process by which a person influences followers; however, Meindl (1995) and Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) warn against romanticising leadership, as if leadership were a phenomenon, whereby leaders deliver it to followers. Oc and Bashshur (2013) explain that leadership is not something delivered independent of recipients, leadership is co-created. Yukl (2012), in fact, defines leadership in a way that could be performed by multiple individuals. Because there is a difference between people in positions of leadership and leadership itself, leadership is either a matter of location or a matter of interaction and influence. The idea that companies are shaped solely by their leaders is challenged by the followership literature (Schneider, Gardner, Hinojosa, & Marin, 2014).

The current study perceives leaders as individuals who have a differential influence on the initiation, direction and coordination of a group and, followers as those who freely accept the influence of leaders, in line with the definitions of Bastardoz and Van Vugt (2019).

Research into followership, specifically follower behaviour, is gaining momentum (Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), and followers are recognised as not being monolithic (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019). Many authors have defined the role of followers as passive in its orientation to the leadership process (Carsten et al., 2010; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Sronce & Arendt, 2009). Followers are acknowledged as necessary, but not as necessary as leaders, to accomplish goals (Oc & Bashshur, 2013). Ford and Harding (2018) believe that followers are helpless conformists who are only driven once persuaded by their leader.

This unidirectional focus on the influence of leaders on followers perceives followers exclusively as passive recipients of the leadership influence (Oc & Bashshur, 2013).

Earlier definitions of leadership tended to define it in terms of maintaining group cohesion and taking initiative, whereas followership requires decisions about which leaders to follow, as well as when and where to follow them (Vugt, 2006). Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012), however, refer to the interaction between a leader and followers as a 'relational view' (p. 1). They posit that leadership is created through social interactions and the relationship between a leader and followers. This relational view, or relational dynamics, is further defined by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) as a mutual influence process in which followers engage with leaders. Earlier theories, such as the leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, emphasise the engagement model between leaders and followers, and how these relationships culminate in effective leadership outcomes (Graen, 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980). Leader–member exchange theory goes as far as to refer to the relationship as dyadic, or two-way, in which one influences the other.

Theory development across the past decade has, therefore, culminated in an understanding that the leader–member exchange is relational, as opposed to one-sided, and that this relationship is key to driving the outcomes or consequences of the work unit (Oc & Bashshur, 2013). Oc (2018), in more recent research, posits that follower traits are important predictors of leadership creation. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) suggest that in the process of leadership, without followers and follower behaviour, there is no leadership. We can, therefore, infer that the study of followers is key to just understanding how the leadership process is affected by follower orientation. In this regard, we adhere to the call by Shamir (2007) to reverse the lens in leadership research by addressing the role of followers in the effectiveness of leadership.

Theoretical foundation and hypotheses development

Role theory and role orientation theory
Role theory is the theoretical foundation for the study. Biddle (1986) explains that role theory concerns one of the most important features of social life, characteristic behaviour patterns or roles. According to role theory, people are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of others. Already in the sixties, Katz and Kahn (1966) emphasised the importance of the perception around requirements of a role, which in turn influences the behaviour associated with the role. Zaleznik, also in the sixties (originally in 1965, more recently cited in 2004), referred to the expectations derived from a hierarchical position, when he asked whether the mystique around leadership is merely a holdover from our childhood, that is, a sense of dependency and a longing for good and heroic parents? Hollander (2009) likewise noted the importance of the origin of the traditional power asymmetric view of the leader–follower relationship as beginning with parent–child relations. Hollander (1992) declares, however:

> In short, leadership is a process, not a person … Leaders do command greater attention and influence, but followers can affect and even constrain leaders' activity in more than passing ways, as has been shown in a variety of studies. (p. 71)

Drawing on role theory, role orientation theory explains that a role orientation would reflect an employee's goals, responsibilities and aspirations within the work environment. The role orientation perspective defines followership as a role (behaviour) played by subordinates in the organisational hierarchy. For example, Parker (2000) suggests that employees who define their role broadly, namely a flexible role orientation, would take responsibility for longer-term goals and will be more proactive in seeking opportunities, than those who define their role more narrowly. Narrow role orientations would mean that followers would define some tasks as not being their jobs, called 'job myopia' (Parker, 2007, p. 403). Parker's (2007) research is relevant to the current study, because it found that individual-level flexible role orientations, as cognitive-motivational mechanisms, had a mediating effect on proactive work behaviours. Carter et al. (2014) agree that followership role orientations are cognitive belief structures and schema around what the follower role means in relation to the leader.

Shamir (2007) explains that followers are co-producers in the leadership process. The notion of followers being co-producers is consistent with the social-cognitive theory of Bandura (1977), which suggests that according to Parker, Williams and Turner (2006), employees could be reflective, self-regulating agents who are not only products but also producers of their environment. Kelley (1992) agrees and offers the concept of exemplary followers who can augment leadership processes. Hollander (1992) noted in this regard:

> Despite the imbalance of power, influence can be exerted in both roles [*leaders and followers*], as part of a social exchange … Effective leadership is more likely to be achieved through reciprocity and the potential for two-way influence than through a reliance on power over others. (p. 71)

Co-production orientation refers to the enhancement of work unit effectiveness when followers who display qualities such as independence, commitment, self-motivation, courage and

honesty (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014) engage and work with the leader to drive outcomes (Carsten et al., 2017; Shamir 2007). Implicit followership theory (IFT) defines the prototype followers as typically 'hardworking, productive, excited and loyal, while anti-prototype followers are defined as arrogant, soft-spoken or rude' (Sy, 2010, p. 2). Hollander (1992, p. 71), however, observes that 'The usual expectation of the leader role as active and the follower role as passive is misconceived even in traditional hierarchies'.

The question might be asked: Do followers perceive their roles as active co-contributors to the leadership process? The current study, therefore, investigates followers' perceptions about their own roles in the leadership process.

Building on the work of Shamir et al. (2007), Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) and Carsten et al. (2017), it is important to understand how followers enact their co-production and passive role orientations. One of the ways in which followers could enact their respective role orientations is employee voice behaviour (Kumar & Mishra, 2016). Whilst the original framework of Hirschman (1970) included exit or withdrawal, as well as raising or voicing of concerns and loyalty, the current study aligns to the organisational behaviour (OB) perspective of voice behaviour. Wilkinson, Barry and Morrison (2020) recently explain that in the OB domain, voice is defined as an attempt to change rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs. Voice behaviour, as noted by Van Dyne and LePine (1998), includes the degree to which employees act on interests that go beyond the self, who are assumed to be acting not just to vent or complain, but to bring about constructive change. The focus is on the microlevel factors that encourage or discourage voice, and voice is portrayed as an individual-level, discretionary, proactive behaviour.

Followers committed to assisting the organisation by engaging in voice behaviour are, therefore, seen to encourage constructive change. In this regard, Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008) found that employees who voice resistance can be a resource for organisational change. Lapierre, Bremner and McMullan (2012) refer to this as pro-active followership and argue that these followers constructively challenge a leader's decisions and ideas by voicing their own ideas and concerns. Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2012) refer to voice behaviour as a positive form of expression that helps advance organisations. This means that followers with a strong co-production orientation will speak up. Morrison (2014) supports this argument, stating that employees who engage in upward voice behaviour may offer information about problems, whilst employees who withhold information may deprive the organisation of useful information. Based on these arguments, the authors of the current study formulated hypotheses aligned to the original study of Carsten et al. (2017):

> Hypothesis 1: Co-production orientation is positively associated with voice behaviour

> Hypothesis 2: Passive role orientation is negatively associated with voice behaviour

According to Yukl and Fu (1999), when delegation occurs, the authority for decisions is owned by the follower, whereas when there is consultation, the authority for decisions stays with the leader. Although consultation is inclusive, some followers will not take responsibility for decisions and transfer the onus onto the leader. Morand (1996) highlights that relative power and status are displayed through patterns of everyday face-to-face activity. He explains that supervisors are said to treat their subordinates in an authoritarian manner and subordinates in turn defer to superiors. Applied to followership, followers with passive role orientation are found to be deferent to the leader's knowledge, accepting and supporting the leader's initiative while remaining loyal in the process (Carsten et al., 2010). These followers tend to refrain from decision making and allow for the work unit's responsibility to remain with the leader and his or her influence (Carsten et al., 2017; Gebert, Heinitz, & Buengeler, 2016). Lapierre et al. (2012) argue that these behaviours are congruent with the traditional view of followers being unquestioning, loyal and less gifted. Kellerman (2007) contributes a follower level of the engagement continuum, where the level of engagement ranges from being isolated and disengaged, to a bystander and taking the path of least resistance, as well as to being committed and deeply involved.

The transfer of responsibility is usually because of employees' feeling, and they do not have the skills to fix a problem or they believe that it is not their responsibility to do so (Carsten et al., 2017). By contrast, there are followers, described as co-production orientated, who would rather take responsibility for problems and remedying issues by not engaging in the upward delegation. Followers who exhibit passive role orientation, however, may engage in the upward delegation. This is congruent with the findings of Carsten et al. (2010), who state that those with passive role orientation followership traits could possibly resist engaging in opportunities that encourage the leadership process and with those of Lapierre et al. (2012), who claim that followers with passive role orientation offer high deference to leaders and refrain from questioning their suggestions. The following hypotheses were developed based on these arguments:

> Hypothesis 3: Co-production orientation is negatively associated with upward delegation.

> Hypothesis 4: Passive role orientation is positively associated with upward delegation.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the current study with hypotheses 1–4.

South African context

Blair and Bligh (2018) emphasise that Africa is one of the regions that are underrepresented in followership theory development. The current study is conducted in South Africa that adds to its contextual contribution within followership literature. Matshoba-Ramuedzisi (2021) also highlighted that because South Africa is grouped under the Sub-Saharan Africa cluster in the GLOBE Study (House et al., 2004), it is
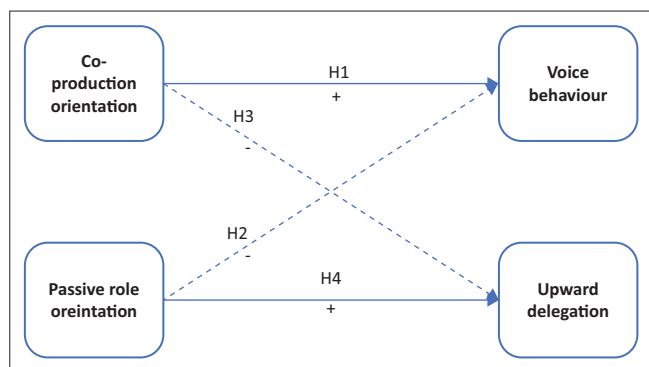
FIGURE 1: Conceptual model of the study.

important to review followership studies in this region. Matshoba-Ramuedzisi (2021) reports that the studies are limited; however, an interesting study in Uganda (Ofumbi, 2017) revealed that the Acholi people enact their followership through a process of observation and the response can either solicit no actions or actions to uphold or change the status quo. The responses of followers include obedience and deference and participation alongside leaders or intervention. The response of followers is important to investigate especially when leaders are ineffective and when they are vindictive or malevolent towards followers. Singh and Bodhanua (2013) conducted a South African study and found that followers are powerful actors who in turn influence other individuals, the organisation itself and the environment in which the organisation is embedded, and studies on followership should, therefore, consider organisational and environmental contexts that contribute how followers think, act and how they perceive their roles, themselves and their duties. This South African study also found that 'there is still a tendency to glorify leaders at the expense of recognizing and understanding the people who choose to follow such leaders' (Singh & Bodhanua, 2013, p. 513). Other Sub-Saharan Africa studies include the studies by Thomas (2014) who applied the Kelley 20-question followership style survey and found that the Rwandan sample had a significant smaller number of exemplary followers than an American sample. Du Plessis and Boshoff (2018) found that followership is a significant influence on employee work engagement.

The study by Carsten et al. (2017) included respondents from a Chinese company across 366 dyads samples. They state that in Chinese culture, leaders understand that there are harmonious relationships between themselves and their followers, and that authority is granted by the followers through deference (McElhatton & Jackson, 2012). The authors claim that these results can be generalised across the world. However, differences in power distance between China and South Africa might challenge this claim. Power distance refers to the expectation that there is an unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2011) between leaders and followers. The GLOBE Study ('House et al., 2004') found that the power distance for Chinese culture was considered very high (Chinese sample = 3.1). In South Africa, however, there were varying power distances for each ethnic group (black people = 3.65, white people = 2.64), according to the

GLOBE Study (House et al., 2004). This suggests that the results across different countries may be dissimilar as LMX relationships have been revealed to be affected by differences in power distance (Anand, Vidyarthi, & Rolnicki, 2017) across different ethnic groups. Power distance, for example, affects the communication between leaders and followers (Anand et al., 2017), which, in turn, can lead to differences in the strength of the correlations than in the Carsten et al. (2017) China study. The present study, therefore, aims to contribute to theory development in followership literature, by offering results in a different cultural context and offering data on followership from a follower perspective.

Method
Research philosophy, sample population and unit of analysis

The philosophy behind the methodology is positivism, whilst the methodological approach is deductive (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The population and unit of analysis are individual employees in corporate businesses in South Africa. The perception of these employees about their own followership was the unit of analysis. The target population sample, therefore, was followers, which means employees who had managers, as the present study investigated role orientations within a hierarchical context. They had to be employees who had work experience at corporate businesses to be able to have the experience of being a follower while reporting to a manager. We were, therefore, interested in a general population of employees who would have work experience and who were reporting to a manager. The researchers worked in corporate businesses and utilised non-probability convenience sampling and targeted their colleagues in their own networks, who had work experience and who were reporting to managers. The focus of the current study was on how the respondent perceived followership, and the questions, therefore, revolved around how the respondents interacted with their manager. The level of management was not part of the research questions. The perceptions of the respondent were important, regardless of the level of management the respondent was at or the level of management of the manager.

The researchers were interested in perceptions around followership throughout the organisation. Except for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a company, the rest of the employees would perceive themselves as having a manager whom they report to and the current study was targeting this broad definition of employees. It is, therefore, difficult to establish the total population from which the sample was drawn. As Johnston, McLaughlin, Rouhani and Bartels (2017) advised, the total number of the employees who had experience of working in organisations and were reporting to managers (called N) was considered to be unknown in this study.

The survey questionnaire included biographical questions to ensure that the respondents met the criteria of the target population. In Table 1, the frequencies and percentages of the

TABLE 1: Sample characteristics with frequencies.

Demographical questions	Frequencies	Percentage
What is your gender?		
Male	168	58.5
Female	118	41.1
Total	287	100
What is your age? (in years)		
Less than 20	1	0.3
20–30	50	17.4
31–40	147	51.2
41–50	66	23.0
51–60	20	7.0
More than 60	3	1.0
Total	287	100
How long have you worked for your current employer? (in years)		
0–2	68	23.7
3–5	76	26.5
6–10	69	24.0
11–15	23	8.0
More than 15	51	17.8
Total	287	100
Counting all locations where your employer operates, what is the total number of persons who work there?		
1	1	0.3
2–9	15	5.2
10–24	19	6.6
25–99	26	9.1
100–499	38	13.2
500–999	11	3.8
1000–4999	28	9.8
5000+	149	51.9
Total	287	100
How long have you been working with your current manager? (in years)		
0–2	149	51.9
3–5	88	30.7
6–10	33	11.5
11–15	7	2.4
More than 15	10	3.5
Total	287	100
Approximately how many hours per week do you spend interacting with your manager? (in hours)		
Other	1	0.3
0	10	3.5
1–10	182	63.4
11–20	46	16.0
21–30	17	5.9
31–40	17	5.9
More than 40	14	4.9
Total	287	100
To which race group do you belong?		
Black people	40	13.9
Mixed race people	15	5.2
White people	71	24.7
Indian people	151	52.6
Asian people	6	2.1
Other	4	1.4
Total	287	100
In which industry are you working in?†		
1	1	0.3
2	3	1.0
3	2	0.7
4	5	1.7
5	6	2.1
6	30	10.5

TABLE 1 (Continues...): Sample characteristics with frequencies.

Demographical questions	Frequencies	Percentage
7	13	4.5
8	17	5.9
9	2	0.7
10	18	6.3
11	6	2.1
12	17	5.9
13	1	0.3
14	7	2.4
15	27	9.4
17	12	4.2
18	6	2.1
19	104	36.2
20	5	1.7
21	3	1.0
22	2	0.7
Total	287	100

Source: The authors collected this data from the sample in the current study
†, The industries' categories covered a range from telecommunications, financial services, manufacturing, mining and under 'others', there were several more listed.

sample are displayed for each biographical question. The biographical questions include gender, age, how long the respondents were working for their current employer, number of employees at the company to ascertain the size of the organisation, the duration of working with their current manager and the hours per week interacting with their current manager, the industry the respondent was working in and which race group the respondent belonged to. It was important to note the number of employees, because small organisations might not have a hierarchical structure where there are employees responding to managers. Because the current study considers followership within this hierarchy of manager and follower, the researchers deem it important to ascertain the size of the organisation.

The researchers monitored whether the respondents had in fact answered the questions on their interaction with their manager and the time of reporting to their current manager. All respondents completed these questions, and therefore they were not excluded from the analysis based on these criteria. The researchers requested their colleagues to forward the survey link to their colleagues who met the criteria, namely having work experience and reporting to a manager in an organisation. The sampling method includes purposive, snowball sampling because of the fact that the respondents were asked to forward the link of the questionnaire to those in their networks who had work experience and reported to managers in their organisations. In summary, we focused on the micro-level analysis of an individual employee on followership.

Data gathering

The survey strategy ensured participant confidentiality as personal information that could be used to identify respondents was not requested (Saunders et al., 2009). An Internet-mediated questionnaire tool (Saunders et al., 2009), Survey Monkey ('Survey Monkey', 2018), was used to create, publish and gather responses for the survey. This allowed for ease of access by respondents and real-time updates on the progress of

sampling. This was not an open survey, and only those employees in the network of the researchers who met the criteria of the sample population (being followers reporting to managers and having work experience in corporate businesses) received the survey link. Incompleteness was handled during data analysis by the removal of incomplete responses (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

A pilot test was administered to 17 respondents to understand the suitability and representativeness of the questions, test for face and content validity and to ensure that scale items were clear and understandable (Saunders et al., 2009; Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). This number was deemed suitable because of the expected power effect in the range of 0.2–0.5 (Cohen, 1992). Some responses to the pilot study revealed errors that included incorrect scale item labelling in certain questions and members of the pilot study reported language errors. These were corrected prior to the distribution of the final survey.

The researchers did not send out the survey link to these pilot respondents and therefore assumed that they did not form part of the final survey respondents. However, the researchers acknowledge that because of the fact that the respondents were asked to forward the survey link to their colleagues, it could have caused the initial pilot respondents to complete the questionnaire again and which in turn could have caused response bias. This is, therefore, a limitation in the survey design of the present study. Because of the fact that personal information, like names and surnames and companies' names, was not requested, the researchers could not control for this potential limitation.

The survey consisted of questions that took approximately 15 min to complete. Respondents were told the purpose of the study and then informed of their voluntary participation and the ability to exit the survey at any time. Nineteen questions relating to the constructs were asked. The final section of the survey requested demographic information as described above. No information concerning the date of birth, identity number, contact details or other personal information was requested. A total of 310 responses were received ($N = 310$).

After the response period lapsed, the data were exported into an Excel file. The data were assessed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics Version 24 (IBM SPSS, 2016). Whilst the original study by Carsten et al. (2017) was conducted in one industry, the current study spanned various industries.

Measurement of variables

The research instrument is a self-completed, structured survey questionnaire (Zikmund et al., 2013). The questionnaire used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with questions relating to co-production orientation, passive role orientation, voice behaviour and upward delegation.

Co-production: This construct was measured by five items from the scale of Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2012), with Cronbach's alpha, 0.90. Sample items included, Followers should be on the lookout for suggestions they can offer to superiors, and followers should communicate their opinions, even when they know leaders may disagree.

Passive role-orientation: This construct was measured using four items from the scale of Carsten et al. (2017). Sample items included:

Because one is a follower, he and/or she does not have to worry about being involved in decision-making; and being a follower means that you don't have to think about changing the way work gets done.

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.93.

Voice behaviour: The construct was assessed using six items from the scale of Van Dyne and LePine (1998). Sample items included:

I communicate my opinions about work issues to my manager even if my opinion is different and others disagree with me; and I develop and make recommendations to my manager concerning issues that affect my work.

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.89.

Upward delegation: Four items were used to measure this variable adapted from the scale of Carsten et al. (2017). Sample items for the upward delegation included:

How often do you pass problems along to your manager rather than taking care of them yourself?; and how often do you pass responsibility for problems to your manager?

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.92.

The questionnaire was similar to the one used in the study by Carsten et al. (2017), except that those concerning the impact of followership on leadership were not included. This is because the present study focuses only on the antecedents of followership, particularly how followers' own beliefs or orientations influence their follower behaviour, within the cultural context of South Africa.

Statistical tests

To understand the sample, initial information was presented as descriptive statistics. The demographic characteristics of the dataset were reported as frequencies. The results of the questionnaire were tested for consistency, validity, reliability and inter-item correlation using Cronbach's alpha test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) (See Table 2 with Cronbach's alpha values). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to confirm convergent validity. Comparative fit index (CFI) was also used to measure the variables and their relation to the

TABLE 2: List of questionnaire items with factor loadings.

Number	Items	Factor loadings
Co-production orientation		
1	Followers should be on the lookout for suggestions they can offer to superiors.	0.68
2	Followers should communicate their opinions, even when they know that leaders may disagree.	0.58
3	Followers need to proactively identify problems that could affect the organisation .	0.64
4	Followers should be proactive in thinking about things that could go wrong.	0.64
5	As part of their role, followers must be willing to challenge superiors' assumptions.	0.62
Passive role orientation		
6	Because one is a follower, he/she does not have to worry about being involved in decision-making.	0.46
7	Being a follower means that you don't have to think about changing the way work gets done.	0.72
8	At the end of the day, followers cannot be held accountable for the performance of a unit.	0.64
9	Followers do not have to take on much responsibility for thinking about how things get done.	0.72
Voice behaviour		
10	I communicate my opinions about work issues to my manager even if my opinion is different and others disagree with me.	0.86
11	I develop and make recommendations to my manager concerning issues that affect my work.	0.80
12	I speak up to my manager with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures.	0.71
13	I speak up to my manager and encourage others to get involved in issues that affect the work environment.	0.76
14	I keep myself well-informed about issues where my opinion might be useful to my manager.	0.85
15	I get involved with my manager on issues that affect the quality of work life.	0.73
Upward delegation		
16	How often do you pass problems to your manager rather than taking care of them yourself?	0.28
17	How often do you pass responsibility for problems to your manager?	0.57
18	How often do you bring your problems to manager along with solutions? (R)	0.80
19	How often do you expect your manager to take care of your problems?	0.76

Source: The authors collected the data from the current sample

construct. To complete an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the constructs, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) coefficient was used to test for sampling adequacy. The Bartlett test of sphericity was used to test the suitability of data reduction.

To test for correlation, the Karl Pearson' coefficient of correlation test was used (Winter, Gosling, & Potter, 2016). This correlation test makes use of Cohen's effect size, whereby an effect size of 0–0.2 is termed small, 0.2–0.5 is termed medium and greater than 0.5 is termed large (Cohen, 1992). Regression analyses were undertaken to offer a more robust analyses of the relationships and an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to analyse strengths of relationships. Control variables were included in the correlation test. Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics are provided below, and Table 1 offers a summary of the frequencies and percentages of specific sample characteristics.

Of the 310 responses that were received ($N = 310$), 11 respondent questionnaires were rejected from the final analysis as 50% or fewer questions were answered. Twelve respondents' questionnaires were removed as they did not

answer the racial demographic question. The reason for this decision was that the researchers assumed that in the South African context, race is an important diversity dimension; however, in the discussion of limitations of the current study, this decision is evaluated. Any responses with between 50% and 99% completion rate were imputed by taking the average of that question and using that for the missing value (per question). So, if a question had an average of 5.2, any missing value was replaced with 5.2. This was done per question for missing responses. Analysis was conducted on the remaining 287 samples ($N = 287$). In terms of race, the white population represented 24.7% of the sample, whilst the black population represented 13.9% and the Indian population represented 52.6% of the sample. The mixed race population was 5.2% and Asian, 2.1% and Others 1.4%. More than 65% of the sample worked in organisations with 500 or more employees. More than 50% of respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years. Males made up 59.04% of the sample, whilst females made up 40.96% of the sample. Working for one's current manager for between 0 and 2 years represented 51.92% of the sample, whilst between 3 and 5 years represented 30.7% of the sample. The remainder worked for their manager for 6–10 years and represented 11.5% or more of the sample (11–15 years: 2.4% and more than 15 years: 3.5%). This question was not a reflection of work experience; instead, it referred to the current manager only. Because most respondents were more than 31 years of age, they would have had adequate work experience to answer questions about their experience of reporting to managers and therefore their perception of followership. With regard to the duration of working for their current employer, 23.7% of respondents indicated that they have been working for 0–2 years for their current employer, whereas 26.5% of respondents indicated that they have been working for 3–5 years and 24% for 6–10 years and 17.8% for more than 15 years. These findings show that the respondents had adequate work experience to report on their perceptions around followership.

The demographic questions included a list of 12 industries where respondents had to indicate in which industry they were working. These industries included mining, telecommunications, manufacturing, financial services, forestry, etc. There was also an 'others' category where respondents could indicate their industries, and therefore there were 22 industries in total. This 'other' category is a limitation in the current study as it made it difficult to ascertain and code the category of industry the respondent was working in. Nonetheless, the current study wanted to source respondents from various industries, and it was not essential to identify the specific industry that the respondents were working in for the purposes of the study on followership. The researchers distributed the link to their contacts within the telecommunications and financial industries; however, because of the fact that the researchers requested these contacts to distribute the link to their colleagues (using snowball sampling), it made it difficult to ascertain exactly in which

industries these respondents were working. Under the section 'limitations and future research', these limitations are discussed.

Ethical considerations

The University Pretoria Gordon Institute of Business Science Ethics Committee granted the ethical clearance, after reviewing our questionnaire and all ethical considerations. See attached ethical clearance letter from our committee. No Ref No. 20 June 2018.

Results

The questionnaire used by Carsten et al. (2017) was used and tested for reliability and consistency using Cronbach's alphas and tested for validity using CFA and EFA. Table 2 shows each questionnaire item as well as factor loadings.

For this research, the sample ($N = 287$) was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Table 3 shows the results for Cronbach's alpha. There was a problem with one item (question 16) as part of the upward delegation construct, and it has to be removed. Because Cronbach's alpha for each variable was greater than 0.7, all remaining questions were kept for the analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

To complete a factor analysis on the sample and constructs, the KMO coefficient was used to test for sampling adequacy, and the Bartlett test of sphericity was used to test the suitability of data reduction (Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett test revealed suitable principal component analysis (PCA) values for all constructs (all $p < 0.05$).

Table 3 shows that the mean for the dependent variables, where co-production orientation was 5.025, whereas the

other role orientation variable, namely passive role orientation was 2.223. In terms of the predictor/independent variables, the values for voice behaviour were 5.073 and for upward delegation 2.274.

The CFA (CFI) outputs, used to measure the variables and their relation to the construct, show the model fit and strength of the relationship. The standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) for each construct is less than 0.08, and CFI is greater than 0.9 (CFI > 0.9), which shows that the model is a good fit. Table 3 contains these results. The analysis was continued using correlation and regression analyses as more robust tests, and the control variables were also included in the analysis, and Table 4 offers the results.

The Pearson correlations presented in Table 4 show that there was a significant positive correlation between the age of respondents and their duration of working for their current manager. This means that the older the respondents, the longer they worked for their current manager. The age of the respondent also had a positive relationship with co-production orientation (0.148 at the 5% level of significance) and a negative relationship with passive role orientation (–0.145 at the 5% level of significance). Co-production orientation had a significant negative relationship with the upward delegation at the smaller than 0.001 level of significance (0.184 at the 0.001 level of significance), however, a significant positive relationship with voice behaviour (0.423 at the 0.001 level of significance). Passive role orientation had a significant positive relationship with the upward delegation at the 0.001 level of significance (0.280 at the 0.001 level of significance). Passive role orientation had, however, a significant negative relationship with voice behaviour (–0.345 at the 0.001 level of significance). Table 5 shows the regression

TABLE 3: Statistical results on mean, standard deviation, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, comparative fit index and standardised root mean square residual.

Constructs	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	KMO	Bartlett's test sphericity	Components extracted	% variance explained	CFI	SRMR
Co-production orientation	5.025	0.669	0.769	0.758	0	1	52.02	0.906	0.0545
Passive role orientation	2.223	0.838	0.715	0.660	0	1	55.176	0.989	0.0255
Voice behaviour	5.073	0.796	0.905	0.905	0	1	68.317	0.984	0.0262
Upward delegation†	-	-	0.664	0.685	0	1	52.755	-	-
Upward delegation‡	2.274	0.659	0.732	0.663	0	1	66.777	0.991	0.0226

Source: The authors collected the data from the current sample.

KMO, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin; CFI, comparative fit index; SRMR, standardised root mean square residual; SD, standard deviation.

Note: †, Question 16 included, but with low factor loading; ‡, Question 16 removed.

$N = 287$.

TABLE 4: Correlations between control variables, dependent and independent/predictor variables.

Dimensions	Age of respondent	Duration of working with current manager	Voice behaviour	Co-production orientation	Passive role orientation	Upward delegation
Age of respondent	1	-	-	-	-	-
Duration of working with current manager	0.270**	1	-	-	-	-
Voice behaviour	0.094	0.005	1	-	-	-
Co-production orientation	0.148*	-0.028	0.423***	1	-	-
Passive role orientation	-0.145*	-0.042	-0.345***	-	1	-
Upward delegation	0.027	0.000	-	-0.184***	0.280***	1

Source: The authors collected the data from the current sample

***, Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (two tailed).

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two tailed).

TABLE 5: Regression model for hypotheses 1–4 (Model 1–4).

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson statistic
Model 1 summary for dependent variable: Voice behaviour and predictor variable: Co-production orientation					
Hypothesis 1: Model 1:	0.423	0.179	0.176	0.723	1.978
Model 2 summary for dependent variable: Voice behaviour and predictor variable: Passive role orientation					
Hypothesis 2: Model 2	0.345	0.119	0.116	0.748	2.198
Model 3 summary for dependent variable: Upward delegation and predictor variable: Co-production orientation					
Hypothesis 3: Model 3	0.184	0.034	0.030	0.649	1.937
Model 4 summary for dependent variable: Upward delegation and predictor variable: Passive role orientation					
Hypothesis 4: Model 4	0.280	0.079	0.075	0.634	1.993

Source: The authors collected the data from the current sample

model for hypotheses 1–4. This table shows the R-square and adjusted R-square as well as the standard error of the estimate.

Table 6 offers the results of the ANOVA with the F-statistic and whether it is significant.

Table 7 shows the results for the regression unstandardised and standardised coefficients for hypotheses 1–4, showing beta and significance.

The tables illustrate why the hypotheses 1–4 showed significant relationships. Hypothesis 1 stated that co-production orientation is positively associated with voice behaviour. A significant regression model fit was found with a significant F-statistic of 62.086 and an R-square of 0.179. The adjusted R-square statistic highlights that 17.6% of the dependent variable: Voice behaviour is explained by the independent/predictor variable, namely co-production orientation. The regression coefficient for the co-production construct orientation was found to be significant with a beta coefficient of 0.423 and a p-value of less than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 1% significance level.

Hypothesis 2 stated that passive role orientation is negatively associated with voice behaviour.

A significant regression model fit was found with a significant F-statistic of 38.597 and an R-square of 0.119. The adjusted R-square statistic highlights that 11.6% of the dependent variable: voice behaviour is explained by the independent/predictor variable, namely passive role orientation. The regression coefficient for the voice behaviour construct orientation was found to be significant with a beta coefficient of –0.345 and a p-value of less than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 1% significance level.

Hypothesis 3 stated that co-production orientation is negatively associated with upward delegation.

A significant regression model fit was found with a significant F-statistic of 9.957 and an R-square of 0.034. The adjusted

TABLE 6: ANOVA for hypotheses 1–4: Dependent variables and predictor variables.

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Model 1: Dependent variable: Voice behaviour; predictor variable: Co-production orientation					
Regression	32.473	1	32.473	62.086	0.000
Residual	149.063	285	0.523	-	-
Total	181.536	286	-	-	-
Model 2: Dependent variable: Voice behaviour; predictor variable: Passive role orientation					
Regression	21.653	1	21.653	38.597	0.000
Residual	159.884	285	0.561	-	-
Total	181.536	286	-	-	-
Model 3: Summary for Dependent variable: Upward delegation and Predictor variable: Co-production orientation					
Regression	4.201	1	4.201	9.957	0.002
Residual	120.237	285	0.422	-	-
Total	124.437	286	-	-	-
Model 4: Summary for Dependent variable: Upward delegation and Predictor variable: Passive role orientation					
Regression	9.783	1	9.783	24.317	0.000
Residual	114.655	285	0.402	-	-
Total	124.437	286	-	-	-

Source: The authors collected the data from the current sample

TABLE 7: Regression unstandardised and standardised coefficients for hypotheses 1–4, showing beta and significance.

Models	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient	t	Sig.
	Beta	Standard error	Beta		
Model 1: Dependent variable: Voice behaviour; predictor variable: Co-production orientation					
(Constant)	2.544	0.324		7.854	0.000
Co-production orientation	0.503	0.064	0.423	7.879	0.000
Model 2: Dependent variable: Voice behaviour; predictor variable: Passive role orientation					
(Constant)	5.804	0.126		46.227	0.000
Passive role orientation	-0.328	0.053	-0.345	-6.213	0.000
Model 3: Dependent variable: Upward delegation; predictor variable: Co-production orientation					
(Constant)	3.184	0.291		10.946	0.000
Co-production orientation	-0.181	0.057	-0.184	-3.156	0.002
Model 4: Dependent variable: Upward delegation; Predictor variable: Passive role orientation					
(Constant)	1.783	0.106		16.774	0.000
Passive role orientation	0.221	0.045	0.280	4.931	0.000

Source: The authors collected the sample from the current data

R-square statistic highlights that 3% of the dependent variable: upward delegation is explained by the independent/predictor variable, namely co-production orientation. The regression coefficient for the co-production construct orientation was found to be significant with a beta coefficient of –0.184 and a p-value of less than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 1% significance level.

Hypothesis 4 stated that passive role orientation is positively associated with upward delegation.

A significant regression model fit was found with a significant F-statistic of 24.317 and an R-square of 0.079. The adjusted R-square statistic highlights that 7.5% of the dependent variable: upward delegation is explained by the independent/predictor variable, namely passive role orientation. The regression coefficient for the passive role orientation was

found to be significant with a beta coefficient of 0.280, and a *p*-value of less than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 1% significance level.

With regard to differences between race groups, initial correlation analyses indicated significant differences between the white people and black people groups, however, when applying more robust tests, namely multiple regression, there were no significant differences in Indian people, white people or black people race groups' role orientations or followership behaviours.

Discussion

Existing literature emphasises leaders' perceptions about followers (Gottfredson et al., 2020). This leader-centric perspective is also evident in Africa (Acquaah et al., 2013; Singh & Bodhanua, 2013). The current study investigated followers' perception about followership. The present research sought to contribute findings to address the dearth of followership research in Sub-Saharan Africa, as observed by Matshoba-Ramuedzisi (2021). Investigating the influence of followership on the leadership process challenges the idea that companies are shaped solely by their leaders (Schneider et al., 2014). Having argued for the necessity of followership for leadership to exist (Oc & Bashshur, 2013), this research found two types of follower behaviour (voice behaviour and upward delegation) that are associated with two types of orientation (co-production and passive role orientation). Both constructs influence the outcomes of a collective work unit.

In cases where followers perceive their roles as merely subordinates, they will have a passive role orientation and contribute less to the leadership process, as they would restrict themselves to think that 'it is not my job', as Parker (2000) explained. The current study makes an important contribution by confirming the hypotheses that for the current sample of followers in South Africa, those who do not perceive themselves as co-producers of the leadership process (Shamir, 2007) would not voice their opinions and would defer accountability to their leaders (Carsten et al., 2017). The hypotheses are systematically discussed below:

Hypothesis 1 confirmed that followers who exhibit co-operative behaviour communicate more frequently with their leaders and speak up about organisational issues, make recommendations, suggest alternative opinions, voice ideas and tend to be more engaged (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). They are also inclined to be active contributors to the leadership process (Carstens et al., 2017), taking on responsibility and suggesting ways of getting things done, challenging leaders and their assumptions, exhibiting pro-active behaviour and able to identify issues affecting the organisation (Shamir, 2007). As hypothesis 3 was confirmed, followers who have a co-production orientation refrain from upward delegation.

Followers with a passive role orientation (hypothesis 2) did not tend to necessarily suggest solutions and defer problems

to their leaders (hypothesis 4). These followers avoid decision-making and taking on more responsibility, are indifferent towards changing the way work gets done and defer accountability for the outcome of a unit (Morrison, 2014).

Drawing on role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966), the current study confirms that role orientations indeed influenced the behaviour of followers from their own perspective. More than 50% of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years and therefore had adequate work experience and mostly in corporate organisations of more than 500 employees. These respondents in our sample realise that their own perceptions of their roles influence their behaviour. Whilst these hypotheses had been confirmed, it appears that the role theory lens in isolation is not adequate to understand the phenomena of followership in the South African environment. It appears that the social constructionism perspective (Carsten et al., 2010) might be more ideal to view followership as it allows for a broader interpretation of roles and places emphasis on the exchange relationships between leaders and followers. More flexible role orientations or role reversals and perhaps even a moving away from roles per se might be required to enhance followership in South African organisations.

Limitations and further research

Response bias may be prevalent when data are collected from hierarchical structures as questions are typically answered to protect relationships (Furnham, 1986; Zikmund et al., 2013). Pilot studies also pose a concern as respondents may respond differently to a survey if they have previously experienced it, resulting from social desirability bias (Furnham, 1986). The authors also acknowledge the possibility of respondent carelessness (Huang, Curran, Keeney, Poposki, & DeShon, 2012). Further limitations include that the study made use of a single source of respondents to assess both the independent/predictor and independent variables and relied on a cross-sectional study and because of the fact that the present design was not an experimental design, the regression analysis presented an inability to test for causality.

As mentioned under the sampling section, the current study's design poses important limitations, and researchers would need to take caution in interpreting the results, and the limitations are decreasing the probability of generalising the results to the total population. The convenience non-probability sampling method is a limitation, and the snowball sampling of respondents sending the survey link to their colleagues could have caused the pilot respondents to be part of the final respondents, which the researchers could not have control over. The researchers also did not use the 12 respondents' data from the initial 310 respondents, who did not complete the question about their race. Whilst the researchers considered race to be important in the context of South African's history, race as control variable was not significant, and in retrospect, the exclusion of these 12 respondents' data poses a limitation of the current study. In future studies, the researchers would recommend not to

exclude respondents' questionnaires from a total sample when they do not complete the question about race.

Because the current study targeted respondents in a range of industries, the respondents were spread across industries. The inclusion of an industry category called 'other' is another limitation in the current study, which resulted in uncertainty around the category of the industry that a respondent represented. Future research could use a standardised list of industries and rather not offer the 'other' category as a choice to respondents in the demographic questions.

Constructs, other than voice behaviour and upward delegation, such as taking initiative, attitude, constructive and dysfunctional resistance and obedience, could be considered in future studies. Furthermore, other mediating factors such as organisational context and environment might be included in research designs going forward. Another suggestion for further research is to use demographic information to present a different perspective on the constructs, based on followers' tenure, size of organisation and possibly the duration of interaction with a manager. Whilst the current study did not find significant differences in how different race groups in South Africa perceived followership role orientation and subsequent follower behaviours, future studies could explore with longitudinal qualitative studies how followers socially construct their perceptions and ultimately contribute to the leadership process.

The current study points to the limitations of role theory in explaining followership and therefore contributes that the lens used in future studies might require a more flexible approach. The theory used as a departure point could influence the hypotheses and the instruments used in assessing these and therefore, future studies could use social constructionism (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), social exchange theory (SET, Blau, 1964) and/or social-cognitive theory of Bandura (1977) to emphasise the agency of followers in co-producing leadership.

Implications for practice

Deconstructing the influence that followers contribute to the leadership process offers a great deal of potential for leadership and management studies. For example, this knowledge has benefits for organisational change and development. The results of the study assist managers and subordinates to better understand the traits of followers (co-produce outcomes or remain passive in their role orientation) and their links to employee voice behaviour or upward delegation. Armed with this understanding, leaders could adopt different leadership styles, based on the follower's orientation, to better manage and delegate work. For example, in cases where a follower is prone to deflect responsibility by upward delegation, the leader could consider the detrimental impact on productivity over the longer term and therefore adapt his or her approach. The

leader could give the follower feedback on the consequences of his and/or her behaviour for the effective running of the business. Without being prescriptive, a leader could, for instance, profile a specific follower, based on his or her orientation, and then use this understanding to communicate more effectively with this subordinate.

The findings also have implications for understanding the organisational fit of employees, based on their orientation and behaviour. They could assist managers, change practitioners, human resource teams and even executives to identify which follower behaviours determine and affect their orientation and contribution towards organisational outcomes. The fit between leaders and followers is also influenced by the follower's orientation and is, therefore, an important variable to consider when matching leaders and followers.

During recruitment, understanding these behaviours can influence the selection of candidates, especially if they display passive role orientation behaviours. The questionnaire used in this study could be used in recruitment as pre-screening exercises to assess orientation so that more informed decisions can be made about suitable candidates. The research instrument used in this study could even be administered to existing employees as part of regular follower assessments. This would give organisations a view of the prevalent behaviour orientations and, where necessary, encourage them to adapt to, or transform, the way in which followers orient themselves. By identifying these behaviours, organisations could even reward or recognise employees who exhibit voice behaviour and refrain from upward delegation.

There is also value for followers themselves as the findings give them a better understanding of their sometimes-subconscious behaviours. Understanding their own orientations may encourage them to adopt or do away with certain behaviours to be more effective within their organisations. As the research was conducted with a sample featuring diverse demographics from across South Africa, without any industry specificity, it is applicable to most leader–follower or manager–subordinate relationships within organisations across the country. Organisations should also pay attention to reorienting leaders towards constructive leadership that is not resistant to followers voicing their opinions.

Conclusion

Whilst the sampling method has limitations, the research presented in this article highlights the importance of follower behaviours and their effects on the bi-directional leadership process. This study extends the work of Carsten et al. (2017) beyond China to South Africa. Within this population, it was revealed that voice behaviour and upward delegation are associated with followers with co-production and passive role orientations, respectively. An understanding of these behaviours and orientations can impact the way change practitioners, leaders and followers interact with one another.

Constructive followership, characterised by the co-creation of solutions that actively contribute towards effective leadership processes, should be encouraged.

Data availability

The data are available on request from the secured database at the University of Pretoria and data are stored without identifiers.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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