# An Analysis Of Followership Styles And Their Correlation With Demography In Indian Public Sector Banks

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**Abstract**

The importance of followers in the leader-follower relationship has been overlooked in leadership research, with scholars often prioritizing the study of leadership itself, as noted by Meindl's "The Romance of Leadership". However, it is crucial to recognize that successful execution and goal achievement heavily rely on the actions and attitudes of followers. Given the current COVID-19 situation and widespread adoption of remote work culture, there has been a permanent shift in the dynamics of leadership and followership in favour of the latter. The purpose of this research is to provide a valuable contribution to the academic field by conducting an empirical investigation of Kelley's The Followership Questionnaire (TFQ), specifically focusing on its sub-scales of Independent Critical Thinking (ICT) and Active Engagement (AE), within the Indian context. Specifically, the study seeks to identify prevalent followership styles within a chosen organization and analyse the relationship between these styles and demographic variables. By administering the Followership Questionnaire to 228 participants from the State of Maharashtra in India, this study can shed light on the importance of followership in the leader-follower relationship, particularly in the context of the prevalent work from home culture and ongoing pandemic. The findings of this study have practical implications for leadership practices and strategies aimed at fostering more effective relationships between leaders and their followers. Ultimately, the research highlights the need to recognize the critical role of followers in achieving organizational success and emphasizes the importance of studying followership in various contexts.

**Keywords:** Followership, Leadership, Banking, Public Sector, Organisational Performance.

## Introduction

Kelley (1992) highlighted that the effectiveness of followers contributes to 80% of an organization's success, whereas only 20% can be attributed to leadership. This indicates that followers have a considerable influence on the performance of organizations. Additionally, Hurwitz (2015) reported that effective followership is linked to notable improvements ranging from 17% to 43% in key performance metrics such as sales, production, quality, revenue per employee, and customer satisfaction. In light of these findings, it is crucial for organizations to prioritize and enhance the effectiveness of their followers. In hierarchical organizations, every member of the team, from officers to employees, is expected to play a dual role of a leader and a follower. As Steger et al. (1982) noted, "We are all followers in some way," and even individuals with the highest level of leadership responsibility ultimately answer to someone. It is important to recognize that within any organization, the number of followers outweighs the number of leaders (Collinson, 2006).

Therefore, organizations should shift their focus from solely romanticizing leadership to appreciating the significance of followership (Meindl, 1995). It is essential for organizations to dedicate concentrated efforts towards developing effective followership, as this can yield substantial improvements in organizational performance and success. By acknowledging the crucial role of followers and actively fostering followership qualities, organizations can create a more balanced and impactful leader-follower dynamic.

## Followers and Followership

Followers can be defined as individuals who support and follow a leader, and who help to achieve the goals of an organization or group. Followership is the act of being a follower, and it is a critical component of the leader-follower relationship. Followership involves not only obedience and compliance but also active engagement, independent thinking, and proactive contributions to the success of the organization. It is an essential component of effective leadership, and without effective followers, leaders cannot achieve their goals or fulfill their vision for the organization. Therefore, understanding the nature of followership is crucial to developing effective leadership practices and creating successful organizations.

The definition of followership has evolved over time. Katz and Kahn (1978) introduced the concept in modern literature as a role, formal or informal, that exists under the context of direction from a leader. In 1955, Hollander proposed a definition of followership, stating that it refers to the degree to which individuals are actively sought out by potential leaders within a group that operates within established institutional boundaries. Taking a different perspective, Townsend and Gebhart (1997) examined followership from the leader's point of view. They defined followership as a process wherein subordinates acknowledge their duty to comply with their leaders' directives, take suitable measures, and strive to perform at their highest potential. Similarly, Bjugstad et al. (2006) also took a leader-centered approach to define followership as the capability of individuals to efficiently execute the instructions of a leader and assist in maximizing the effectiveness of a structured organization. Kelley expanded on the idea of followership introduced by Katz and Kahn and provided his own definition, which describes followership as the act of pursuing a common goal through active engagement and participation. In

contrast to Katz and Kahn's view, Kelley (1992) defined leadership and followership in distinct ways. According to Kelley, effective followers have the ability to see the big picture as well as the details, work collaboratively with others, possess personal strength and moral balance, and have a desire to contribute to a team effort towards achieving a greater common goal without needing to be a hero. This definition emphasizes the importance of followership and highlights the qualities that make an effective follower.

The concept of followership has evolved over time, with different scholars offering various definitions. Katz and Kahn (1978) first introduced the idea of followership in modern literature as a role that exists under the direction of a leader. Kelley's definition of followership, which was introduced in 1988, described it as the act of pursuing a common goal through active engagement and participation. Chaleff later built upon this definition, expanding it to a reciprocal exchange of influence between individuals with shared goals or purposes. Kellerman (2008) defined followers as individuals who have lesser authority, power, and influence than their superiors, and who typically conform to established practices. However, Stech (2008) contested this hierarchical viewpoint, arguing that the relationship between leadership and followership represents an influential process, irrespective of rank or position.

Agho (2009) claimed that one can only become an effective leader after being an effective follower, suggesting that followership is an experiential necessity for leadership. In summary, followership and leadership are often viewed as similar or having a symbiotic relationship. While followership involves accepting the influence of others to achieve a common goal, leadership can also be seen as a collaborative effort.

## Followers Typology

The most widely accepted typology is proposed by Kelley (1992), who described effective followers as being enthusiastic, intelligent, ambitious, and self-reliant. Kelley's typology of followers includes five different types of followers, based on their degree of independence, critical thinking, and activity or passivity. The five types of followers are:

1. **Alienated Followers**: These are individuals who are passive and independent thinkers. They are not enthusiastic about their work and lack commitment to the group's goals.

2. **Conformist Followers**: These are individuals who are not independent thinkers but are highly active. They follow orders and do not question the group's goals or methods.

3. **Pragmatic Followers**: These are individuals who are independent thinkers but are also highly active. They are able to balance their own goals and values with those of the group, and are flexible in adapting to changing circumstances.

4. **Passive Followers**: These are individuals who are not independent thinkers and are also passive. They wait for direction and do not take initiative or responsibility.

5. **Exemplary Followers**: These are individuals who are independent thinkers and highly active. They are committed to the group's goals and values, and are willing to speak up when they disagree or see something wrong. They exhibit courage and conscience in their actions and decisions.

Kelley believed that all followers could become exemplary followers with the right training and support. He argued that exemplary followers are not passive, but rather highly engaged and committed to the success of the group, while also being independent thinkers and willing to speak up when needed.

**Correlation between Followership Style and Performance and Job Satisfaction**

The relationship between followership style and organizational performance and job satisfaction is significant. Effective followership is linked to better job satisfaction, increased productivity, and higher levels of organizational commitment. Followers who demonstrate independent and critical thinking, actively engage in their work, and make proactive contributions to the organization tend to feel more satisfied with their jobs and take pride in their work. Additionally, they tend to be more committed to the organization and are less likely to leave their jobs, leading to higher retention rates and lower turnover costs. Moreover, effective followership supports organizational performance by helping leaders achieve the goals of the organization. Effective followers who collaborate with others, possess personal strength and moral balance, and strive towards achieving a common goal as a team, are vital to the organization's success. They provide valuable feedback to leaders and help to ensure that the organization is operating efficiently and effectively. Therefore, promoting and encouraging effective followership within an organization can lead to improved performance, higher retention rates, and more satisfied and committed employees.

**Review of Literature**

Several instruments have been developed to measure followership within organizations. These instruments aim to assess the various dimensions and qualities of followership, providing insights into follower behaviours, attitudes, and effectiveness. Here are a few commonly used instruments for measuring followership:

Kelley's Followership Questionnaire (KFQ) developed by Robert E. Kelley (1992), this questionnaire assesses five dimensions of followership: management of self, commitment to the organization, competence and integrity, service orientation, and critical thinking. The KFQ measures followership styles and provides a comprehensive understanding of followers' behaviours and attitudes.

Chaleff's Followership Scale (CFS) is based on Ira Chaleff's (1995) book "The Courageous Follower," this scale measures followership behaviours and attitudes. It focuses on the roles and responsibilities of followers and identifies different types of followership, such as resourceful, active, and independent followers.

Follower Readiness Scale (FRS) presented by Hersey and Blanchard (1969), the FRS assesses followers' readiness to perform tasks and adapt to new situations. It measures followers' abilities and willingness to take responsibility and make decisions independently, providing insight into their readiness to contribute to organizational goals.

Follower Behaviour Questionnaire (FBQ) introduced by Schyns and Schilling (2013), focuses on assessing followers' behaviours within a specific leadership context. It measures dimensions such as active engagement, critical thinking, cooperation, and supportiveness, providing insights into the behaviours that contribute to effective followership.

Followership Style Questionnaire (FSQ) developed by Zenger and Folkman (2014), measures followers' behaviours and styles. It assesses dimensions such as active engagement, independent thinking, supportive behaviour, and courageous action, providing a comprehensive understanding of followership styles and their impact on organizational outcomes.

When selecting an instrument for measuring followership, it is important to consider the specific needs and goals of the research or assessment. Each instrument has its own strengths and limitations, so researchers and practitioners should choose the one that aligns best with their objectives and context. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure the reliability and validity of the chosen instrument to obtain accurate and meaningful results.

A study conducted by Gatti et al. (2014) in Italy investigated followership using Kelley's instrument. The study included 610 respondents from various organizational settings, such as healthcare and bank retailers. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were employed to analyze the data and assess the instrument's validity. Blanchard et al. (2009) conducted a similar study in the USA, testing The Followership Questionnaire (TFQ) on university employees and proposing a modified version of the instrument.

In contrast, there has been limited research on followership in India. Only one study by Walia (2018) has been conducted using Kelley's TFQ, but it was limited to one city and did not encompass the diverse sub-cultures and sub-nationalities of the country. To address this research gap, the present study aims to empirically test Kelley's TFQ in an Indian context. By doing so, it seeks to provide insights into followership within the Indian context and fill the void of research in this area.

## Research Methodology

## Sampling Method

As per Kelley's followership instrument, the TFQ comprises 20 questions and includes two sub-scales, namely Independent Critical Thinking (ICT) and Active Engagement (AE). Each sub-scale is measured using 10 sets of questions based on a Likert scale.

## Research Questions

The current study aims to use TFQ to explore followership styles and examine the correlation between followership styles and demographic variables in a public sector banks in India. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the prevalent followership styles in an Indian public sector bank?
2. What is the relationship between demographic variables and followership styles in a public sector bank setting in an emerging economy like India?

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of followership styles and their relationship with demographic variables within the specific context of a hierarchical organization in the Indian public sector banking industry, which has evolved over a century.

**Analysis of Demographic Characteristics**

A diverse group of organizational roles were represented among the 228 participants who completed the self-reporting TFQ. All of the participants were employed within a well-known public sector organization based in India, and their positions ranged from managers to individuals in top-level management. This suggests that the study was able to capture insights from a broad spectrum of organizational levels and job functions. Among the participants, 73% were male, while 27% were female. This distribution reflects the predominant gender composition in governmental organizations in India. Additionally, a significant majority of the participants, accounting for 89% of the total, were married.

Regarding family structures, 62% of the participants reported living in joint families, suggesting a preference for extended familial arrangements among the sample population. In terms of age distribution, 57% of the participants were above the age of 40, indicating a significant proportion of experienced professionals within the organization. Education-wise, 76.4% of the participants held a bachelor's degree, highlighting the prevalence of undergraduate qualifications among the sample. Moreover, a notable 96% of the participants reported possessing either a bachelor's or a master's degree, indicating a relatively high level of educational attainment.

The study also observed that the highest participation came from individuals occupying managerial to top-level executive positions. These positions are considered entry-level roles within the executive cadre of the banking sector, suggesting a focus on capturing insights from the organizational leadership. Furthermore, 65.5% of the participants had been serving the organization for more than 15 years, indicating a significant level of long-term commitment and tenure among the sample population.

**Data Analysis and Results**

**Normality Test of TFQ Score**

The distribution of the overall score of TFQ was tested for normality. However, the distribution is nearly normal, as it does not show any significant deviations from a normal distribution. The skewness value, calculated using SPSS, was -0.377, which falls within the acceptable range of -1 to +1. Additionally, the excess kurtosis value was 0.078, which is also within the acceptable range. These results indicate that the distribution of the overall TFQ score is approximately normal, allowing the researcher to apply parametric methods for data analysis.

## Reliability Test of TFQ

To assess the internal consistency of the data, the reliability test was performed using the SPSS tool. The data's reliability is determined based on Cronbach's alpha, and an alpha value greater than 0.70 is considered acceptable for instrument reliability, according to L. J. Cronbach (1951). The results show that the overall TFQ has good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for both sub-scales, and it was found to be 0.67 for ICT and 0.74 for AE questionnaires. The reliability was also checked by deleting questions one by one, and no significant variation in Cronbach's alpha was found. Based on the evidence presented, it can be inferred that the TFQ, along with its sub-scales, demonstrates strong reliability as a measurement tool for assessing followership.

## Validity Test of TFQ

The results of the validity test using Pearson's correlation coefficient indicate that all questions have a significant correlation with the total score, with sig. values less than 0.05. The correlation coefficients range from 0.534 to 0.688, indicating a strong positive relationship between each question and the total score. The corrected item-total correlation values range from 0.477 to 0.641, indicating good internal consistency between each question and the overall scale. These results suggest that the TFQ is a valid measure of followership styles in the context of public sector banks in Maharashtra, India.

**Table No. 1: Validity Test Results using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient**

| Question No. | Correlation Coefficient | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Question No. | Correlation Coefficient | Corrected Item-Total Correlation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q.1 | 0.688 | 0.641 | Q.11 | 0.661 | 0.604 |
| Q.2 | 0.676 | 0.627 | Q.12 | 0.649 | 0.585 |
| Q.3 | 0.597 | 0.532 | Q.13 | 0.617 | 0.592 |
| Q.4 | 0.624 | 0.571 | Q.14 | 0.598 | 0.536 |
| Q.5 | 0.605 | 0.552 | Q.15 | 0.658 | 0.594 |
| Q.6 | 0.570 | 0.512 | Q.16 | 0.608 | 0.567 |
| Q.7 | 0.596 | 0.534 | Q.17 | 0.578 | 0.512 |
| Q.8 | 0.534 | 0.477 | Q.18 | 0.634 | 0.515 |
| Q.9 | 0.587 | 0.524 | Q.19 | 0.591 | 0.565 |
| Q.10 | 0.575 | 0.512 | Q.20 | 0.657 | 0.585 |

Note: A significance value (Sig. Value) below 0.05 indicates a statistically significant correlation between the question and the total score.
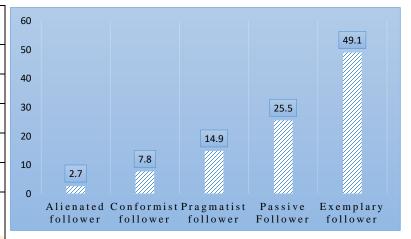
It is observed from Table No. 1, that the correlation between each question's score and the total score of TFQ is significant at the .01 level. This result was obtained by using Pearson's correlation coefficient with a two-tailed test and a confidence interval of 95%. The sample size is 228, which gives a degree of freedom of 226 (228 - 2). Using the significance table for Pearson's correlation coefficient with a degree of freedom of 226 and a significance level of .05, the critical value was found to be 0.139. As shown in Table No. 1, the Pearson's correlation value for each question is greater than the critical value of 0.139. Therefore, all 20 questions of TFQ are considered valid.

## Analysis of Followership Styles

The research methodology involved the use of two sub-scales of the TFQ to extract followership styles among the participants, as outlined in the study. The distribution of these styles is presented in Table No. 2.

### Table No. 2: Followership Styles in Public Sector Banks

| Followership Style | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Alienated follower | 6 | 2.7 |
| Conformist follower | 18 | 7.8 |
| Pragmatist follower | 34 | 14.9 |
| Passive Follower | 58 | 25.5 |
| Exemplary follower | 112 | 49.1 |
| **Total** | **228** | **100.00** |



According to the above table, the most commonly observed followership style in the study was the "exemplary" style, which represented 49.1% of the sample. The "passive" style was the second most prevalent, accounting for 25.5% of the sample, followed by the "pragmatist" style, which was observed in 14.9% of the participants. The "conformist" style was represented in 7.8% of the sample, while only 2.7% of participants were identified as "alienated" followers. These findings provide insight into the prevalence and distribution of followership styles within the sample population, which can be useful for understanding group dynamics and leadership effectiveness.

## Comparative Analysis

To gain a proper understanding of the distribution of followership styles, it is useful to compare the results from the above table with those of other empirical studies as shown in Table No. 3.

### Table No. 3: Comparative Analysis

| Followership Style | Kelley (1992) | Mertler et al.(1997) | Francis (2014) | Oyetunji et al. (2013) | Novikov (2016) | Hicks et al. (2018) | Present Study |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Passive** | 5%–10% | 0% | 0% | 10.2% | 0% | 0% | 2.7% |
| **Alienated** | 15%–25% | 0% | 0% | 13.6% | 1.8% | 0% | 7.8% |
| **Conformist** | 20%–30% | 1.6% | 0% | 0% | 3.5% | 8.7% | 14.9% |
| **Pragmatist** | 25%–35% | 35% | 36.4% | 63.6% | 24% | 14.8% | 25.5% |
| **Exemplary** | 0%–35% | 63.3% | 63.6% | 12.5% | 70.2% | 76.4% | 49.1% |

One such study was conducted by Mertler et al.(1997), which focused on elementary and secondary school teachers in the USA. Another study by Francis (2014) focused on secondary school teachers in the UK, while a third study by Oyetunji et al. (2013) targeted private university teachers in Botswana. A fourth study by Novikov (2016) focused on army officers in a project management unit in the USA, and a fifth study by Hicks et al. (2018) targeted high school teachers in New Hampshire, USA. All five of these studies found that, on average, 57.2% of followers were exemplary, 34.7% were pragmatist, and 3.08% were conformist. However, the Oyetunji study was the only one that did not find any passive followers, while all the other studies found almost zero alienated followers.

**Findings of the Study**

The findings of the present study, which focused on the public banking sector in India, are consistent with those of the latest studies. The high percentage of exemplary followers may be attributed to the highly unionized atmosphere in the public sector, coupled with the high job security that comes with being a government organization. This high job security may have reduced the fear of coercive action from leaders, resulting in a high ICT score. Similarly, frequent interaction due to union activities may have increased engagement, resulting in a high AE score.

**Table No. 4: Description of Demographic Characteristics**

| Variable | Pearson Chi-Square (χ2) | P Value |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | 0.767 | .753 |
| Marital status | 0.624 | .866 |
| Family | 2.611 | .345 |
| Age group | 7.828 | .496 |
| Qualification | 4.681 | .793 |
| Designation | 8.507 | .894 |
| Length of service | 8.159 | .789 |

**Recommendation**

The practical implications of the study suggest that the public sector banks under study should focus on harnessing the large number of exemplary followers to improve organizational performance through various human resource initiatives and implementation of key result areas and balanced scorecard. The leadership should be sensitized to use a commensurate leadership style with these followers to improve the organizational performance. The study also highlights the importance of learning and honing effective followership skills for better performance of organizations as well as individuals. Therefore, the authors recommend that instructions on followership should form an integral part of undergraduate and postgraduate education in India. The findings of the study propose that every BBA and MBA program offered in India should include a mandatory course on followership as part of their graduation requirements. It is recommended that followership be gradually integrated into all undergraduate programs. The senior management should also include followership theory and practice in their management development programs and training to improve the performance of the organization.

**Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of effective followership and leadership for organizational resilience and sustainability. In the current era of remote working and crisis, leaders need a strong understanding of followership theory and practice to encourage effective followership behaviour within organizations. The literature on leadership and followership shows that effective leaders and followers share many traits and qualities and assume the role of leader or follower interchangeably. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate followership skills to achieve effective leadership. This requires a reliable and valid instrument for measuring followership styles across industries, countries, and cultures. Further, it indicate that the TFQ has demonstrated both reliability and validity within the Indian context, establishing its suitability for utilization in training programs that emphasize leadership and followership within organizations. Additionally, the most prevalent followership style in the studied organization was found to be 'exemplary followership,' and there was no significant relationship between followership style and demographic characteristics.

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