



Understanding Followership: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Followership has started to become the center of attention of scholars since several decades ago. The promotion of the followership concept was first echoed by Kelley in the Harvard Business Review in 1988. In order to understand more about followership, it helps to learn more about the various meanings of followership from social scientists. Based on these considerations, this study aims to synthesize and evaluate the notions of followership, both from the trait and state perspective. The method used in this study is a literature review by conducting a scoping review of various previous studies in order to answer the current research objectives. First of all, we define the search protocol. The next step is to do a thematic analysis based on the results of the search protocol. The results show that there are four main themes related to the notion of followership. The four themes are followership as a role and positional behavior, followership as personal characteristics and abilities of followers, followership as a process and condition of being a follower, and followership as a macro perspective. In the context of the trait and situational approach, there is a difference in the meaning of followership. The trait approach emphasizes the personal characteristics of followers, while the state approach focuses on the role and position, the followers' abilities, and the processes and conditions of being a follower. The conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of this scoping review is that the concept of followership has a broad understanding and has an impact on the scope of the research results. The next conclusion relates to trait and state approach, which has its own implications for its emphasis on the followership definition.

INTRODUCTION

Followership is an important topic that can support the success of the organization's functioning. This is reflected in the fact that followership has started to become a concern for decades. The promotion of followership concept was first echoed by Kelley (1988) in the Harvard Business Review. In fact, research results show that followers can influence leader behavior (Chaleff, 2009; R. E. Kelley, 1992; Oc & Bashshur, 2013a; Robert Kelley, 1988; Schindler, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014a; Zawawi et al., 2012).

Scholars have shifted their attention from the topic of leadership to followership. There are several reasons why this change occurred. The first reason is the occurrence of social changes in America and several other countries. Prior to the 1980s, vertical and authoritarian hierarchies were common. However, things changed in the early 1980s as America was hit by the economic crisis. As a result, many organizations are becoming more structurally flat and responsibilities are delegated to followers. The

second reason is that behavioral theorists began to discuss the active role of followers in the early 20th century. The third reason is the emergence of active followership theory (Baker, 2007).

Followership has several positive impacts, which can be seen from several research results. Followership can also increase organizational commitment (Lee & Reade, 2018), affect the perception of leaders (Carsten et al., 2018), have an effect on better job satisfaction (M. Jin et al., 2016), have a direct positive impact on the ability to make decisions (Amin et al., 2020), higher benevolence leadership (X. Wang & Peng, 2016), and positive impact on shared and common values (Fontoura & Coelho, 2020). In addition, engagement is positively related to employee marketing, both internally and externally (Su et al., 2019). Followership also has a positive impact on individual creativity (Kong et al., 2019; L. Wang & Liang, 2020) as well as an indirect positive relationship with follower work engagement (Veestraeten et al., 2020).

A better understanding of the concept of followership can improve training and organizational performance because it can apply followership properly (Crossman & Crossman, 2011). In order to understand more about followership, it's good to learn more about the various meanings of followership from social scientists that have been published in various scientific journals. This understanding will make the participation can be seen more comprehensively and intact. Based on these arguments, this study aims to synthesize and evaluate the notions of followership, both from the trait and state perspective.

METHOD

The method used in this research is a literature review by conducting a scoping review of various previous studies in order to answer the current research objective, namely to synthesize and evaluate the notions of followership, both from the trait and state perspective. The following are the steps of the method.

Define the search protocol

The first step is to determine the literature search protocol. The followership is a literature search protocol that has been created :

1. Perform a search on journal databases (Ebscohost, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, Proquest, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, and Springer Link All Journal) with the keywords "Followership", "Definition", "State", and "Trait" accompanied by boolean operators "AND" and "OR". The details of the search words are as follows "Followership AND Definition AND (State OR Trait)". In addition, a search was also carried out in the Garuda database (Indonesian database) with the keywords "Pengertian AND Kepengikutan AND (Keadaan OR Sifat)". The criteria for the articles are journal articles, while the year of publication is not limited in order to get an overview of the development of the understanding of followership. The results obtained search results a number of 3111 articles. Table 1 below is a detailed search result.

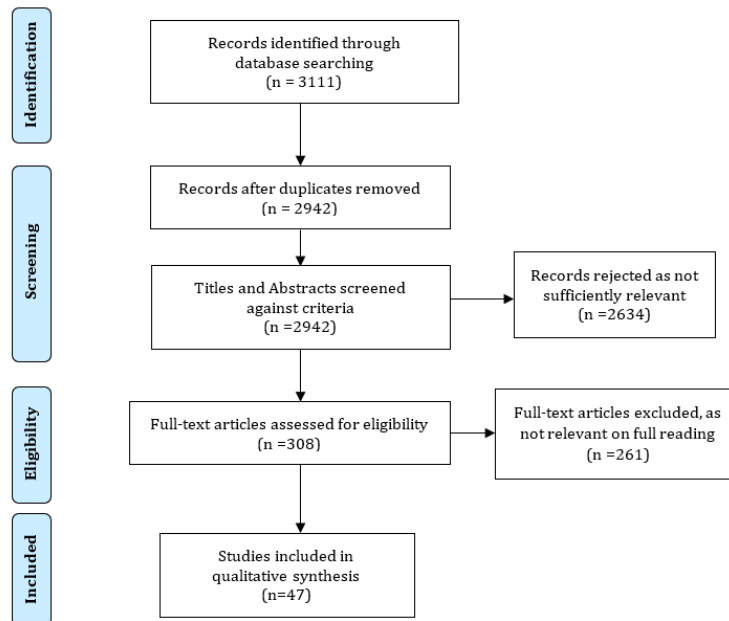
Table 1. Search Result Details

Database	Number of Articles
Ebscohost	3
Emerald Insight	0
JSTOR	801
Proquest	979
Sage	755

Science Direct	364
Scopus	1
Springer Link All Journal	208
GARUDA	0

- Identifying duplicate search results articles (found 169 articles and deleted them). After deletion, there are still a number of 2942 articles.
- Screening titles and abstracts of articles from 2942 available articles. The inclusion criteria are that there is the word "followership" in the title or abstract, or both. As a result, there were 308 articles that entered the inclusion criteria, while a total of 2634 articles were excluded from the criteria (exclusion).
- The results of screening the title and abstract of the article are then read in full to see their suitability. The inclusion criteria are that there is an explanation for what followership means. As a result, there were 47 articles that entered the inclusion criteria, while a total of 261 articles were excluded from the criteria (exclusion).
- The findings from the inclusion criteria for the full article (47 articles) were then analyzed to find the meaning of followership, classifying it based on the perspective of state or trait. In order to clarify the search protocol and the results of the search analysis, the followership Prism Flowchart (figure 1) and the followership definition table (table 2) are included.

Figure 1. Prism Flowchart



The results of the search protocol are various meanings of followership that are conveyed by the scientists.

Thematic analysis

After obtaining the results in the form of definitions of followership, then a thematic analysis was carried out in order to get a general understanding of the meaning of followership. The results of the

thematic analysis carried out are general patterns about the notion of followership. Thematic analysis itself is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns contained in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are several stages in conducting data analysis using thematic analysis. These stages are understanding the data, compiling codes, and looking for themes (Heriyanto, 2018).

In the data comprehension stage, we try to get an understanding of the various meanings of followership by giving notes on the definition of followership for each author. After understanding the data, code identification (coding) was carried out on the notes that had been made (appendix 1). In the third stage, a theme search is carried out by first grouping the coding results and making a description of the code groups obtained. The process of giving the code and grouping the code is done according to the purpose of the search. After making a description of the code group, the next step is to identify the theme according to the description of the existing code group (appendix 2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the search protocol stages that have been carried out, the results obtained are various definitions of followership, which are categorized into two groups (trait and state). Table 2 is the various definitions of followership explained by authors from various scientific journals:

Table 2. Various Definitions of Followership

Authors	Followership Definitions	
	Trait	State
(Carsten et al., 2010)		How individuals carry out their roles as subordinates, which are related to follower schemas, and are influenced by their organizational context (culture, leadership style).
(Gilbert & Hyde, 1988)		The behavior of subordinates in the context of their relationship with superiors, which is reflected in the dimensions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partnership with superiors 2. Commitment to work 3. Technical competence 4. Humorous 5. Addiction 6. Positive working relationship 7. Tendency to express opinions 8. The right reporting.
(Billot et al., 2013)	A person's expertise, quality, character, and strength in the context of being a follower.	
(Ronald & Julia, 2021)		Seeing the advantages of following the leader.
(Gross, 2020)		Follower behavior and its interaction with leadership.
(Xu et al., 2019)		Multidimensional behavior in which followers interact with the leadership and organizational context with a specific motivation-oriented approach.
(Ivanoska et al., 2019)		The ability of followers to influence the leader and contribute to the improvement and achievement of organizational and group goals, indicating upward influence in the vertical hierarchy.

Authors	Followership Definitions	
	Trait	State
(Aarum, 2019)		Followership is something that is recognized/know by subordinates.
(Gross, 2019)		Active participants who act actively and independently, and think critically.
(Prilipko, 2019)		Behavioral characteristics shown by individuals in their roles as followers.
(Jia et al., 2018)		Individual behavior displayed during interaction with the leader.
(C. Leung et al., 2018)		The individual's process of following someone, and related to how much involvement and influence it has on the people they follow.
(Gobble, 2017)		The <i>state</i> of being a motivated, engaged, and productive follower (not a transition state to practice leadership), which is in line with the organization's ethos and strategy.
(Shahzadi et al., 2017)		The role that the individual plays as a follower in the leadership process.
(Behery, 2016)	Behavioral styles and personality attributes of followers are influenced by two behavioral dimensions, namely freedom of thought and activeness of behavior.	
(Foley, 2015)		Role as a follower that supports the effectiveness of the leadership process.
(Mohamadza deh et al., 2015)		A growing paradigm in organizational behavior that focuses primarily on followers.
(Alvesson & Blom, 2015)		Position or identity is often experienced negatively, compared to leadership.
(Brumm & Drury, 2013)		The process of followers working together with leaders to optimize performance in achieving organizational goals.
(Antelo, Prilipko, et al., 2010)	As an independent unit, which is an idea about the personal attributes of followers.	
(Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2009)	As two separate competencies: providing leadership support and personal management, which refers to follower behavior in specific and general situations.	
(Bjugstad et		Ability to effectively follow directions and support the

Authors	Followership Definitions	
	Trait	State
al., 2006)		leader's efforts to maximize a structured organization.
(Montesino, 2003)		The reciprocal process of leadership.
(Densten & Gray, 2001)		Follower behavior that results from the influence relationship between the leader and the follower.
(Townsend & Gebhardt, 1997)		An ongoing role, as a prerequisite for leadership, as well as a shared responsibility between individuals and organizations.
(Gatti et al., 2017)		Individual behavior in relation to the leader.
(Crossman & Crossman, 2011)		Things that complement leadership, namely the relationship role in which followers have the ability to influence the leader and contribute to the improvement and achievement of group and organizational goals.
(Crippen, 2012)		It is the act or condition of following the leader.
(Agho, 2009)	As a complement to leadership that supports organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and includes important character traits for each individual who wants to lead others.	
(e Cunha et al., 2013)		It is the way individuals carry out their roles as followers that affect the leadership process and the organization.
(Hinić et al., 2017)		As an activity that influences directly or indirectly, or as a role for individuals who are influenced by the leader.
(Kang et al., 2016)		Positioned as a model for productive public organizations to maintain harmony in the relationship between employers and employees as well as among colleagues in order to achieve common goals.
(van Vugt, 2006)		As a strategy that specializes in solving coordination problems, which involve decisions about who to follow, when, and where.
(Robinson & Fiset, 2021)		As a schema relating to followers.
(Everett, 2016)		As a follower-related role whose relationship is interactive and interdependent with the leader, which influences the culture, and has an impact on the achievement of common goals.
(M. H. Jin et al., 2019)		Is a behavior to provide services to leaders, in order to achieve the goals and mission of the organization.
(Carsten et		Followership as a role orientation and behavior (role

Authors	Followership Definitions	
	Trait	State
al., 2018)		orientation and behavior), which is divided into co-production orientation and passive role orientation
(Kim & Schachter, 2015)		The role of individuals to think actively, be involved, and provide opinions to leaders to achieve organizational goals.
(R. Martin, 2015)		Is a process that occurs between the parties (follower-leader), which affects the working relationship, by emphasizing the role of followers.
(Blom & Lundgren, 2020a)		As acceptance of a position of less influence in relation to others by allowing ideas, understandings, values and/or emotions to be influenced to a significant degree.
(Einola & Alvesson, 2021)		Group-based (sustained) social construction in which people relate to one another dynamically and create interactions, including significant elements of asymmetric influence.
(Pietraszewski, 2020)		The evolving role of information processing to form and maintain groups.
(Plachy & Smunt, 2021)		As a way for members to apply talents to support the organization's vision, goals, and processes.
(J. Martin, 2019)		It is a social construct that influences how leaders and followers are perceived and how they perceive themselves.
(Bastardo & van Vugt, 2019)		Is part of the adaptive psychological system of individuals to coordinate actions with others (leaders) in order to function effectively in groups.
(Uhl-Bien et al., 2014c)		The study of the nature and impact of followers and followership on the leadership process.
(Oc & Bashshur, 2013b)		Perspectives on follower behavior and how it affects the leader.

After that, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the various definitions of followership that had been obtained. Based on the thematic analysis process that has been carried out on various definitions of followership, it was found that there are four themes regarding the notion of followership (both from the perspective of trait and state). The four themes are:

1. Followership as role and position behavior
2. Followership as personal characteristics and abilities of follower
3. Followership as a process and condition of being a follower
4. Followership as a macro perspective

Discussion

In order to get a more complete understanding of the four themes regarding the notion of followership, we will discuss each of the themes that have been found

1. Followership as role and position behavior

The theme of followership as a role or position behavior is a theme that has the highest number of codes when compared to other themes. The number of definitions from the authors under the auspices of this theme is 25 definitions. This reflects that many scholars associate the concept of followership with behavior, roles, and positions. Based on this theme, followership is defined as a number of behaviors displayed by individuals because they have a certain role or position in the organization. These roles include relationship roles, role orientations, and information processing roles. The role itself is a series of certain behaviors caused by a certain position (Lantaeda et al., 2017). Follower behavior also appears when individuals interact with leaders and organizational contexts, such as organizational culture and leadership style (Carsten et al., 2010; Crippen, 2012; Densten & Gray, 2001; Gatti et al., 2017; Gilbert & Hyde, 1988; Gross, 2020; Jia et al., 2018; M. H. Jin et al., 2019; Prilipko et al., 2019).

2. Followership as a personal characteristic and follower ability

The second theme found from thematic analysis results of the various definitions of followership is personal characteristic and ability of followers. The explanation of this theme is that followership is a number of personal characteristics and abilities that individuals have when following others. This provides an overview of how followership is seen not as a process, but rather as a set of criteria that an individual must meet to become a follower. The criteria in question are personal criteria and abilities. The theme of followership as a personal characteristic and ability of followers is composed of 10 definitions from social scientists. When viewed in more detail, 5 out of 10 existing definitions use a trait approach in explaining followership. While the other 5 use the state approach. The difference between trait and state approaches is in the aspect of the criteria for followers. The trait approach places more emphasis on the personal criteria of followers, while the state approach emphasizes the criteria for abilities that followers must possess. These abilities include the ability to see future opportunities, to influence leaders and contribute to the organization, and the ability to psychologically adapt to leaders (Aarum, 2019; Bastardoz & van Vugt, 2019; Ivanoska et al., 2019; Ronald & Julia, 2021). The personal criteria of followers include self-quality characteristics and personal attributes of personality (Agho, 2009; Antelo, Henderson, et al., 2010; Behery, 2016; Billot et al., 2013; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2009).

3. Followership as a process and condition of being a follower

The identification result of themes from the thematic analysis that also emerged was followership as a process and condition of being a follower. This theme is the theme with the least number of definitions from the characters when compared to other themes, which are 5 references. Based on these findings, it can be seen that the discussion of followership from a process point of view and conditions has not been widely carried out by social scientists. In the context of this theme, scholars discuss followership as a process and condition that occurs when following other people. In terms of process, the notion of followership is focused on the dynamics that occur between followers and the people they follow. As for the condition's context, followership is explained by emphasizing the organizational impact (Blom & Lundgren, 2020b; Brumm & Drury, 2013; Gobble, 2017; A. Leung & Sy, 2018; Montesino, 2003)

4. Followership as a macro perspective

The fourth theme that emerges from the thematic analysis of the notion of followership is followership as a macro perspective. The theme of followership as a macro perspective consists of 7 definitions of followership from scholars. This theme describes followership as a macro perspective in viewing organizational dynamics. Based on this explanation, it can be seen that followership is no longer seen in the individual context, but from a broader perspective. These points of view include: social construction, paradigm, strategy, and perspective. The social construction point of view sees followership as a construct that is formed from dynamic relationships within groups and influences each other. These social constructs have an impact on individual perceptions of leaders and followers,

as well as on oneself (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; J. Martin, 2019). The next broader point of view is the paradigm. Paradigm is a set of logically related concepts to create a conceptual framework that is useful for interpreting and explaining existing phenomena or problems (Susanto, 2014). From a paradigm point of view, followership is seen as one of the emerging paradigms in the field of organizational behavior, which focuses on followers (Mohamadzadeh et al., 2015). The next point of view is strategy, which sees followership as a strategy in an organizational context (Kang et al., 2016; van Vugt, 2006). The next point of view is perspective, which views followership as a study of follower impact (Oc & Bashshur, 2013a; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014b).

Conclusion

Based on the thematic analysis results of various followership definitions from scholars, four themes were found as discussed in the previous section. A summary of the findings of the themes and their explanations can be seen in table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Findings Themes

Emerging Themes	Explanation
Followership as role and position behavior	Followership as a number of behaviors displayed by individuals because they have a certain role or position in the organization.
Followership as personal characteristics and abilities of followers	Followership is a number of personal characteristics and abilities possessed by individuals when following others.
Followership as a process and condition of being a follower	Followership as a process and condition that occurs when being a follower of others..
Followership as a macro perspective Participation as a macro	Followership as a macro perspective in viewing organizational dynamics.

A distinctive finding of the trait approach to followership definitions is its emphasis on the follower’s personal characteristics. To make it clearer, the differences between trait and state approach based on the emphasis of the themes can be summarized as in table 4.

Table 4. Themes Summary

Trait approach	State approach
Emphasize the personal characteristics of followers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Emphasizes role and position behavior; 2) Emphasize the ability characteristics of followers; 3) Emphasize the process and conditions of being a follower; and 4) Focus on macro perspective

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Conflict of Interest:

The author declares there is no potential conflict of interest.

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