

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

WWW.CIKD.CA

journal homepage: <https://www.ijol.cikd.ca>



Exploring Global Followership Phenomenon in Global Organizational Context: A Study of Global Followers Within Global Technology Companies

Abdurrahim Hocagil

Indiana Institute of Technology, USA;
Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada

Keywords:

Global leadership, Global followership, Followership, Organizational culture, Leadership process

Received

27 March 2024

Received in revised form

17 April 2024

Accepted

26 April 2024

*Correspondence:

abdurrahimhocagil@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of global followers within global technology organizations and how they develop their global followership behaviors. The global followership concept differs from followership in domestic contexts due to the complexities of the global environment, such as the intersection of multiplicity, complexity, ambiguity, and flux influence in the context of global business operations. The present study used three research questions: (1) How do global followers at global technology organizations describe their lived experiences that help them develop global followership behaviors? (2) How do global followers describe how global organizational context plays a role in global followership development processes? (3) How does global followers' national culture shape their global followership behaviors? Purposeful and snowball sampling strategies were used to recruit the seven participants who agreed to participate in the study and give semi-structured interviews. Data analysis revealed four core themes: 1) following effectively, 2) following globally, 3) developing continuously, and 4) managing challenges. The critical importance of the findings such as adjusting cultural norms, staying up to date, and effectively communicating that influence the ability to engage followers in global leadership processes have shown that global followers are equal contributors to global leadership outcomes within global technology organizations. The findings will help future global followers and global leaders to better contribute to co-construction of global leadership processes in their organizations

Leadership success requires a strong leader-follower relationship. Engaged followers who work closely with leaders to advance an organizational mission are a requirement for businesses. “Successful leadership today requires the support, engagement, and critical thinking of individuals who serve effectively in a follower role” (Carsten & Lapierre, 2014, p. 21). Despite its importance to leadership processes and outcomes in organizational contexts, leadership scholars only recently started researching followers’ contributions to leadership (Bjugstad et al., 2006; Kilburn, 2010; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). There is limited knowledge about the role of followers’ contribution to leadership processes (Carsten et al., 2010). However, it is vital for us to understand followers’ role and influence on leadership processes since as the one side of the leader-follower relationship followers will greatly influence the leadership outcomes.

The rapid pace of globalization forced organizations to develop global leaders with global capabilities, skills, and characteristics to effectively perform global tasks and responsibilities, as well as influence and motivate their followers (Mendenhall et al., 2012). This movement has dramatically increased the number of global leadership studies in the last decade (Avolio et al., 2009; Mendenhall et al., 2018). Much of the foci in these empirical studies were on defining global leadership (Reiche et al., 2017), the scope of leadership tasks (Osland et al., 2013), context, leadership behaviors (Huesing & Ludema, 2017), competencies and skills (Kim & McLean, 2015; Mendenhall & Osland, 2002), assessment instruments (Van der Zee & Van der Oudenhoven, 2000), training and development (Tompson & Tompson, 2013), ethics (Jones & Millar, 2010), gender (Javidan et al., 2016), and responsible global leadership (Pless et al., 2011). While this movement forced scholars to focus on the global leadership phenomena, it is evident that followership from a global perspective did not receive the same attention despite its importance.

The first conceptual work on the global followership phenomenon was Tolstikov-Mast (2016), who proposed global followership as a vital element of the global leadership process and developed a global followership model and conceptual definition. However, there are no empirical studies published in the leadership and management literature that investigate global followership. Scholars may overlook global followership and its connection to a leadership process. Comparable to how Carsten and Lapierre (2014) emphasized the importance of followership in leadership in domestic organizational settings, global followership is similarly important to global leadership. Because leadership is a dynamic process that occurs with the interactions of leaders and followers in a context (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), scholars should investigate followership from a global perspective.

Exploring global followership is important because leadership scholars and practitioners characterize followers differently depending on their followership behaviors towards their leaders as well as characterize followers’ behaviors differently from employees’ behaviors (Carsten et al., 2010; Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2008). These behavioral differences may influence relational dynamics between leaders, followers, and employees. Carsten et al.’s (2010) findings suggest that followers are actively engaged in decision processes, take initiative, and oppose their leaders’ decisions in contrast to employees, who are more submissive and tend to not question their leaders’ instructions.

Purpose of The Study

Even though several studies have been conducted to understand leader-follower relationships that advance leadership processes (e.g., Baker et al., 2016; Carsten et al., 2010; Han et al., 2019; Schuder, 2016; Shahzadi et al., 2017; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), none focused on such relationships on a global organizational context. Several scholars (e.g., Baker et al., 2016; Schuder, 2016) have investigated different international or cross-cultural leader-follower interactions in a variety of different local contexts such as Uganda (Nonyonga, 2015), China (Lawrence, 2017), and Pakistan (Ghias et al., 2018). However, there are currently no empirical studies on global followership. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore the global followership phenomenon within the global organizational context. This study uses a phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of global followers and how they develop their global followership behaviors. The global organizations included in the present study are complex global organizations within the technology industry.

It is important to understand what it takes to become a global follower in global organizations, where technological advancements are being developed, adopted, and disrupt the way people work. These developments shape industries and organizations around the world in ways that affect how organizations create and capture value, and how and where people work, interact, and communicate with each other (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Employee behaviors and types of jobs in organizations are influenced by these developments. For instance, computer programs and robots powered by artificial intelligence can perform complex tasks with a high level of technical skills, and in such a context having technical skills to create, cope with, and adapt to work with such intelligent systems would be an important key aspect of being an effective global follower in global technology organizations.

Theoretical Framework

Followership Theory

Followership theory was an important part of the theoretical framework that created the basis for the understanding of leader-follower relations in organizational context. Historically, followership has been treated from five different perspectives that are leader-centric, follower-centric, relational views of followership, role-based followership, and constructionist followership (Bjugstad et al., 2006; Carsten et al., 2010; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Leader-centric approaches focus on leaders as the main actors of leadership while acknowledging followers as subordinates who are blindly obedient to leaders' orders without resistance or initiative (Kelley, 1988) or recipients or moderators of leaders' influence (Shamir, 2007).

Follower-centric approaches focus on followers' role in constructing leaders and leadership. In this approach, leadership is seen as a social construction generated by followers' cognitive, attributional, and social identity processes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). The most popular approaches to explore follower-centric perspectives of leadership are the romance of leadership (Meindl et al., 1985), followers' implicit leadership theories (i.e., followers' assumptions about the traits and abilities that characterize an ideal business leader) (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004), and social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001).

Relational approaches of followership view leadership as a mutual influence process among leaders and followers that is shaped by a social system created by leaders, followers, tasks, and context (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). According to this approach, leaders and followers have

reciprocal influence processes in their relationships (Oc & Bashshur, 2013) and these relationships are influenced by context, task, and personal qualities of leaders and followers (Lord et al., 2001).

Role-based followership approach assumes leaders as recipients or moderators of follower influence in producing leadership outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Carsten et al. (2010) explored the social construction of roles followers attribute to themselves: passive role construction, active role construction, and proactive role construction. In passive role construction, respondents saw the follower role as passive and identified the follower role as doing things as their leader ordered. In active role construction, respondents saw the followership role as active and emphasized the importance of offering their input, when their leaders solicited it. Lastly, proactive role construction respondents saw the followership role as a more proactive construct characterized by taking initiative, providing feedback and advice to leaders, and constructively challenging their leaders' decisions.

Despite earlier efforts to explore and explain followership and leader-follower relational dynamics in organizational context, the first formal theory of followership was developed by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014). They defined followership theory as "...the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process" (p. 96). Such a definition consists of followers' role orientations, following behaviors, and outcomes related to the leadership process. Based on this definition, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) also defined followership as "the characteristics, behaviors and processes of individuals acting in relation to their leaders" (p. 96), where the authors characterized followership behaviors as different than general employee behavior. Instead, according to followership theory, followers identify themselves as individuals who are in relation with leaders as followers within their specific context. Furthermore, while establishing theoretical boundaries, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) proposed three constructs of followership research with sample dimensions of a) followership characteristics, b) followership behaviors, and c) followership outcomes. They defined followership characteristics as characteristics that impact how one enacts and defines followership (e.g., followers' role orientations, followers' motivations, and social constructions of followers' identities). Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) defined followership behaviors as behaviors enacted from a follower role's standpoint or in the act of following (e.g., obedience, dissent, voicing, resisting, advising, initiate taking, upward influence). Followership outcomes are characteristics and behaviors at the individual, relationship, and work-unit levels (e.g., leader reactions to followers such as burnout or contempt; follower advancement or dismissal; whether leaders trust and seek advice from followers; how followership contributes to the leadership process). Uhl-Bien et al. also cautioned that a key consideration must be whether a chosen dimension fits in followership domain. "Followership theory is not the study of leadership from the follower perspective. It is the study of how followers view and enact following behaviors in relation to leaders" (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014, p. 96). A dimension used in the leadership domain may not be used in followership research and a selected dimension should be considered in the context where the following takes place and be operationalized accordingly (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) identified two potential theoretical frameworks for the study of followership. The first framework is a role-based approach called "revising the lens" that investigates how followers enact their roles, and outcomes of these follower role behaviors.

The focus of the revising the lens framework is to understand the factors that influence how followers construct their roles and the various followership role orientations such as passive, active, or proactive, and how leadership or organizational context such as leadership style or organizational climate influence these role constructions. This approach highlights how followers' characteristics and behaviors may affect followership outcomes, leadership behaviors, and organizational effectiveness. At the individual level, followers can affect their leaders about their motivation and energy, while at the organizational level, followership behavior can impact unit-level decision-making, ethical conduct, and problem-solving.

The second framework is called the leadership process, which explores how leaders and followers interact together in a given context to co-create leadership and its outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). According to this perspective, also called the constructivist approach, leadership is a process that is co-constructed by leaders' and followers' joint efforts, which is not strictly limited by hierarchical positions. In this perspective, individuals in managerial positions can also follow and might not lead, and individuals in subordinate positions can also lead and might not follow (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). The framework assumes followers are co-constructors of the leadership process instead of obedient individuals and followership behaviors could involve co-producing leadership outcomes by "...advising, challenging, correcting, or persuading [leaders] in a respectful and trusting way to generate more effective outcomes" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 99).

Because of its conceptualization of followers as co-constructors of leadership processes and outcomes, the present study used the leadership process framework to explore global followership phenomenon within global organizational context. The leadership process framework focuses on both leading and following behaviors, and equal contributions of leaders and followers to leadership processes. According to this framework, followers are individuals who are active participants in leadership processes, engage in decision-making, and are able to voice their opinions. Because of such conceptualization of followers, the leadership process framework was a better fit for the present study and adopted by the researchers.

Global Followership

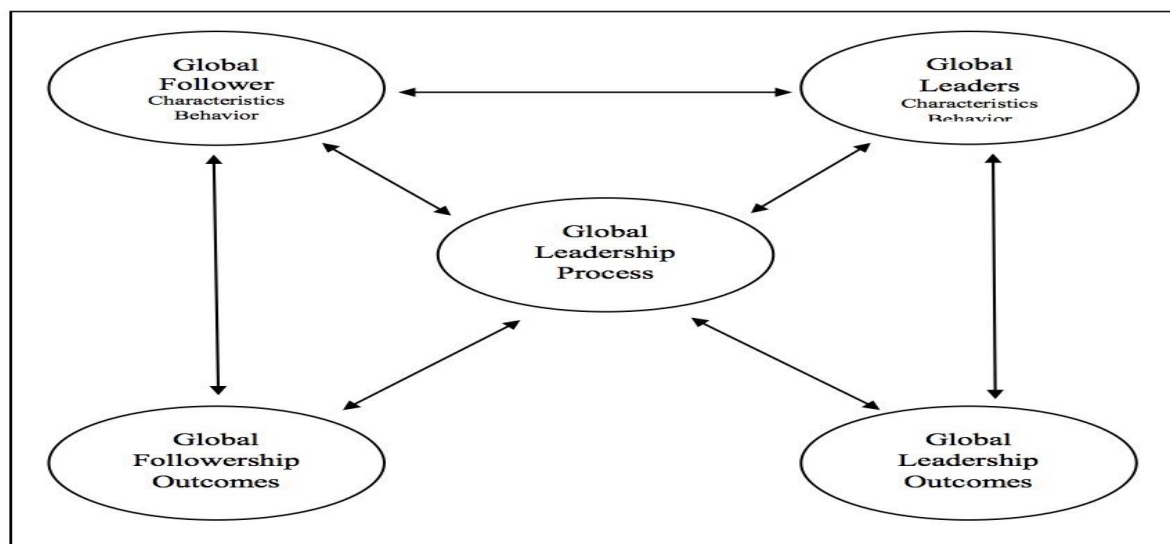
As aforementioned, global followership is a newly emerging concept in the global leadership literature. In the first conceptual work on global followership, Tolstikov-Mast (2016) proposed global followership as a vital element of the global leadership process and developed a global leadership model along with the conceptual definition of global followership. Tolstikov-Mast based her theoretical work on two assumptions: (1) global leaders and global followers are engaged in a partnering relationship to create the global leadership processes and (2) global followers and followers have distinctive characteristics that are shaped by their specific environments. The author emphasized the role global context plays in global leader-follower dynamics. This global leadership model describes how global leaders and their global followers interact within the global context to co-create global leadership, global followership, and global leadership outcomes.

In the model (see [Figure 1](#)), Tolstikov-Mast (2016) listed several elements and dimensions of the global followership construct that are extrapolated from the leadership literature: global followership characteristics, global followership behaviors, global followership and global leadership outcomes, and global multi-contextual environment. Furthermore, Tolstikov-Mast

defined global followership as “the relational process of a courageous contribution to the global leadership outcomes mediated by diverse global followers’ characteristics, behaviors, and outcomes within a complex global organizational environment” (p.147). Tolstikov-Mast defined a global follower as “an exemplary individual who freely, constructively, and courageously contributes to a mutually empowering partnership with global leaders and shares talent to benefit global leadership outcomes in the complex global environment” (p. 147). This definition of a global follower was used in the present study; however, it is important to note that while this definition is based on the current theoretical understanding of followership and global leadership, it has not been empirically tested.

Figure 1

Global Leadership Model



Note. From “Global Followership: Launch of a scholarly Journey.” by Tokstikov-Mast, 2016, *Advances in global leadership*, 9, p.142. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Reprinted with the author’s permission.

Similar to followership theory, the global followership model is built on the social constructivist approach to global leadership processes. Global followers and global leaders create synergy and engage in the global leadership process by working together toward a common organizational goal (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). However, global followers are theorized to engage in following within the complex and multidimensional global context; this increases the intensity of the following experience that requires global followers to develop a certain set of skills (see Table 1) to perform their global following successfully in relation to their global leaders. Tolstikov-Mast exemplified the increased intensity of global following in global organizations, as global followers might need to adapt to a diversity of their co-followers in overseas operations, as well as to a variety of unique systems and processes influenced by diverse cultural values. In order to support organizational outcomes, such global followers might need to collaborate with and work for foreign organizations with unfamiliar leadership methods and “...temporarily assume global leadership roles, assist with or lead boundary spanning initiatives, become members of cross-functional teams, or review a vast amount of organizational information among other organizational responsibilities” (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016, p.128).

Table 1
Global Followership Elements and Dimensions

Global Followership Characteristics	Global Followership Behavior	Global Followership Outcomes	Global Leadership Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Followership identity Motivation to follow Active role orientation (e.g., dynamic, active, responsible, involved, courageous) Fluid role orientation Traits (e.g., humble, active learner, forward-looking, perseverance, tolerance, gender, commuting distance, employment contract, work-related knowledge). Cognitive complexity Commitment Emotional intelligence Cultural sensitivity Self-management Intercultural competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive behavior Initiative taking Advising Adapting Partnership building Talent contribution Fostering relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High potential Follower effectiveness Effective role-switching Personal transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision enactment Performance Leadership emergence Organizational goals completion Effective partnership Mutual co-dependence Trust/Respect Development of courageous consciousness Partnership maturity Effective role-switching Integrated global talents Global knowledge management Task complexity
Global Multi-Dimensional Context			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational context (e.g., task requirements, reward systems, mentoring programs, socialization, normative pressures, organizational constraints, work values, strategic goals) External context (e.g., political constraints, legal requirements, industry type, global employment trends) Value system (e.g., national culture values, religious values) 			

Note. Reprinted with the author's permission from Y. Tolstikov-Mast (2016) *Global Followership: Launch of a scholarly Journey*. In *Advances in global leadership* (pp. 107-150). Emerald Group Publishing Limited, p.140

Influence of Global Organizational Context on Global Followership Behaviors

It is important to understand the global organizational context and its influence on leaders' and followers' behaviors; the context in which followers exist may shape their behaviors (Carsten et al., 2010). Organizational contextual variables, such as organizational culture and leadership styles, influence followers' self-perceptions. For example, Carsten et al.'s findings revealed followers' self-schemas range from passive to more proactive. However, their findings revealed that social constructions of self-schemas in a specific organizational context are shaped by "...contextual variables of leadership styles (authoritarian or supportive/empowering) and climate (bureaucratic/hierarchical or empowering)" (p.558). Meanwhile, in summarizing the leadership identity literature, Ibarra et al. (2014) posited that individuals identify themselves differently in different contexts. For instance, leaders coming from a hierarchical culture may guide their subordinates in a paternalistic manner, due to their understanding of a leader as a non-collaborative member of a team. Leaders from more egalitarian cultures would conceivably incorporate collaboration into their conceptualization of the leadership process and behave accordingly.

Political views, differences in policies and regulations, and culture's effects on business operations and business structures are only a few examples of differences of nations in the global context that affect organizational behavior therefore play an important role in global leadership processes at global organizations (Canals, 2014). Global environmental complexity

and intercultural interactions are the two global contextual factors explored by global leadership scholars as factors influencing global leadership (Mendenhall et al., 2018; Reiche, et al., 2017).

Global environmental complexity. Global business context is more complex than local context in many different aspects (Mendenhall et al., 2012). These differences create four major groups of sources that define today's complex global business environments: multiplicity, complexity, ambiguity, and flux (Mendenhall et al., 2018). Multiplicity refers to an increased number of business and organizational issues that global leaders and followers face in global context. These global leaders must balance the needs of multiple stakeholders (Mendenhall, 2018). Complexity refers to increased interdependency between components of global organizational context such as economies, value chains, mergers and acquisitions, alliances, joint ventures, and virtual teamwork. Such complexity creates higher expectations from leaders in terms of performance and skill sets. Ambiguity refers to a lack of clear information, less reliable information due to increased uncertainty and rapidly changing trends, and potential multiple interpretations of the same fact due to cross-cultural differences in global context (Mendenhall, 2018). Lastly, flux refers to the unpredictable and rapidly changing dynamics of global environment. Mendenhall (2018) defined flux in global context as "...an environment of nonlinear, ongoing, shifting in terms of system dynamics, values, organizational structure, industry trends, and socio-political stability" (p.21). These four sources define global context and play an important role in global leadership processes within a global organizational context. Global multidimensional context is a "...critical element that distinguishes and affects global following. Global mobility, employment trends, and institutional strategic goals (contextual examples) are among the factors that dictate diverse experiences, work arrangements, or talents needed for the success of global leadership outcomes" (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016, p.140).

Intercultural interactions. It is important to consider how intercultural interactions affect global followers' behaviors. These intercultural interactions are a major global organizational contextual factor, given that global organizations contain individuals from different cultures. Culture is defined by and shapes people's values, beliefs, and behaviors (Morgan, 2006). Understanding and embracing cultural differences is the most important dimension of cross-cultural interactions (Rifkin, 2006). There are four points of cross-cultural miscommunication that employees most likely will face in cross-cultural interactions: verbal communication, nonverbal communication, negotiation, and forms of agreement (Rifkin, 2006). Rifkin (2006) further emphasizes the big difference of people who compose global companies by emphasizing the importance of commonplace behaviors such as eating, working, and thinking in foreign environments as central to developing a successful organization.

The lack of empirical knowledge about global followership alongside accumulated scholarship in global leadership and followership revealed a need for empirical research while offering theoretical support for it. Contextual factors that play an important role are global environmental complexity and intercultural interactions that influence global followers and global leaders; these factors influence behavior and therefore the co-construction processes of global leadership and followership.

Method

The purpose of the present study was to explore the global followership within global organizational context to advance the current body of knowledge on global leadership processes. To do that, we utilized a qualitative research approach, specifically transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology, a textural description, a structural description, and the essence of lived experiences of participants emerge from rigorous data gathering and reciprocal data analysis procedures. The researchers gather data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. We also used member checking as a form of triangulation (Creswell, 2013) and epoché (Moustakas, 1994) to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

Recruitment Procedures and Interviews

Participants were recruited by three different methods. The first method was a gatekeeper who worked at a global non-profit organization who contacted a list of potential participants based on the selection criteria. The criteria were (1) individuals in positions that required them to perform international tasks and interactions during their daily activities, and (2) who were at mid-level managerial positions. The gatekeeper then introduced the participants who agreed to participate to one of the researchers of this study via email. All five participants indicated their willingness to participate, but only four followed through. A second recruitment method was a list of individuals from LinkedIn who met the criteria. Two individuals responded to the invitation emails and indicated their willingness to participate. The third method involved snowball sampling (Dusek et al., 2015), where we contacted individuals, we personally knew to ask them to suggest potential participants. One individual suggested three potential participants working at a global software company and made an introduction. Two out of those three individuals indicated their willingness to participate.

Data Collection

We provided an informed consent form for participants to sign via email along with online screening questions to determine whether they could be considered as global followers prior to their interview. This was important because as it was suggested in literature not all the employees in subordinate roles are considered as followers (Tolstokov-Mast, 2016). To select individuals as global followers, we developed five screening questions based on the literature. Participants self-reported whether (yes/no) they engaged in a series of behaviors or endorsed beliefs about their roles. The screening questions included statements such as, “Followers should watch for opportunities to provide suggestions they can offer to their superiors,” and “Followers must be willing to challenge superiors’ assumptions when they see it is necessary to enhance outcomes.”

In light of the research questions of the present study, we developed open-ended interview questions that explored lived experiences of participants and how they develop global followership behaviors. The initial questions were followed up with comments and follow-up questions to elicit the whole lived experiences of participants. The interview questions were broad, starting with “Tell me about your organization and your position,” then followed by more detailed questions. A series of questions about organizational culture were prefaced with the definition, “I’m going to ask you about organizational culture. By this, I mean a system of

predominantly shared values, beliefs, and practices that govern how people behave in organizations.” One subsequent question was, “How do you believe your organization’s culture and structure influences your relationship with your leader?”

Seven individuals responded to the invitation emails, signed the informed consent forms, responded screening questions, and scheduled an interview. While the goal was to interview eight to 10 participants, the number of interviews depended on the data saturation point, which is the point that “no further new information is being obtained from participants” (Hancock et al., 2016, p. 2115). The interviews were semi-structured and conducted through Skype Business, Google Hangout, or Zoom and were recorded by two methods: (1) Audacity, a digital audio recording application, and (2) through a digital audio recording device. Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and organizational positions. Table 2 records this information, such as a head of global sales living in the United States who is coming from the Middle East and a director of product management in the United Kingdom coming from Ghana, Africa. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their identities.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Number and Pseudonym	Gender	Home Country	Current Country	Current Position	Education	Years of Experience (Total)
P1- Khan	Male	India	Qatar	Director of Customer Engagement	Master’s Degree	7 years
P2-Peyami	Male	Iran	United States	Group VP - Global Service Provider Sales	Undergrad Degree	18 years
P3- Erkan	Male	Turkey	Dubai	Marketing Director of Middle East	PhD Candidate	10 years
P4- Eddy	Male	Ghana	United Kingdom	Director of Product Management	Undergrad Degree	2 years
P5-Jacob	Male	US	Unites States	VP of Sales for Americans Region	Master’s Degree	5 years
P6-Walter	Male	Austria	Germany	Senior Principal Product Manager for EMEA	Undergrad Degree	15 years
P7-Imran	Female	Morocco	United States	QA Lead Architect	Master’s Degree	5 years

Transcription and Analysis

One of the researchers manually transcribed the interview audio recordings. All participants were English speakers and used English as a primary language at their jobs. The transcripts were sent to the participants so that they could ensure accuracy and correct errors, known as member checking, which enhances the credibility of the findings. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, and one participant made some amendments to his responses. He made some grammatical corrections and rephrased some of his sentences to make them more meaningful.

All interview transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo 12 (QSR) qualitative analysis software for analysis. The first step of data analysis was epoché, a systematic effort to set aside personal experiences and preconceptions while analyzing each interview transcript to reduce bias and view each transcript from a fresh perspective. The first author utilized journaling to achieve epoché. Each transcript was reviewed with an open mind to explore the important themes that emerged from the analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Discovery of Themes

During this step of the data analysis, the invariant constituents--statements that are relative to the experience—were clustered into themes. The codes were rechecked and assigned statements or passages were to evaluate the consistency of coding. Multiple readings of transcripts resulted in 68 codes through open coding. After eliminating repetitive and irrelevant codes, 42 codes remained, a process known as thematic coding. These clustered invariant constituents were further reduced to 37 invariant constituents shared by at least two participants. These invariant constituents formed the core themes of experience (Moustakas, 1994). Table 3, 4, and 5 lists the 37 invariant constituents derived from the research questions and indicate which participant provided a response about the corresponding invariant constituent.

Table 3

Invariant Constituents Derived Based on Research Question 1

Invariant Constituents	Participant						
	Khan	Peyami	Erkan	Eddy	Jacob	Walter	Imran
Appreciating Diversity and Different Cultures	X	X	X	X			
Being Aware of Your Internal and External Environment	X	X	X		X	X	
Be Responsive to Leader's Encouragement to Speak Up	X		X		X		X
Being Collaborative and Servitude		X			X	X	X
Being Team Oriented			X		X	X	X
Being Creative and Innovative					X		X
Being Proactive as A Follower and Being Entrepreneurial	X		X		X		X
Being Subject Matter Expert	X	X		X		X	X
Being Technology Oriented			X				X
Being Trustworthy			X	X	X	X	
Challenging Leaders Decisions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Syncing with Organizational Culture	X		X	X	X	X	X
Communicating Effectively	X	X		X		X	X
Be Creative and Open to Communicate					X		X
Being Transparent		X	X	X		X	
Enabling Others To Be Effective		X		X	X	X	X
Foster People To Be Creative and Provide Feedback					X		X
Leading by Example		X				X	
Learning On the Job		X		X		X	X
Managing Conflicts			X	X	X	X	X
Seeking Training For Development		X			X		
Training for Self-Awareness			X		X		X
Training For Technical Expertise		X	X				X

Training Self to Be Able to See Different Perspectives	X	X	X	X		
Show and Create Your Value		X	X	X		
Taking The Lead	X		X		X	X

Table 4*Invariant Constituents Derived Based on Research Question 2*

Invariant Constituents:	Participant Number						
	Khan	Peyami	Erkan	Eddy	Jacob	Walter	Imran
Environmental Challenges	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Different ways of doing business					X	X	
Openness of Organizational Culture	X			X	X		X
Openness and Agility		X	X		X		
Organizational Structure	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Organizational Training	X		X		X		X
Building Trust	X		X				
Being Connected and Keeping up With Technology	X		X				X

Table 5*Invariant Constituents Derived Based on Research Question 3*

Invariant Constituents:	Participant Number						
	Khan	Peyami	Erkan	Eddy	Jacob	Walter	Imran
Being Flexible		X			X		X
Managing Cross-cultural Relationships	X	X	X		X	X	X
Adjusting Your Cultural Norms	X		X	X		X	

Validation of Themes

Invariant constituents and their accompanying theme were checked against the transcripts for validation as suggested by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas suggested asking three questions while validating themes, which are: (1) Are the themes expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (2) Are the themes compatible if they are not explicitly expressed? (3) If the themes are not explicitly expressed or compatible, they are irrelevant to the participant's experience and should be deleted. The core themes were determined by answering these questions. We also checked transcripts to ensure that no statement was missed.

Results

In the next step of data analysis, the invariant constituents were clustered into four core themes and related sub-themes. The core teams are: (1) following effectively, (2) following globally, (3) developing continuously, and (4) managing challenges.

Textual and Structural Descriptions

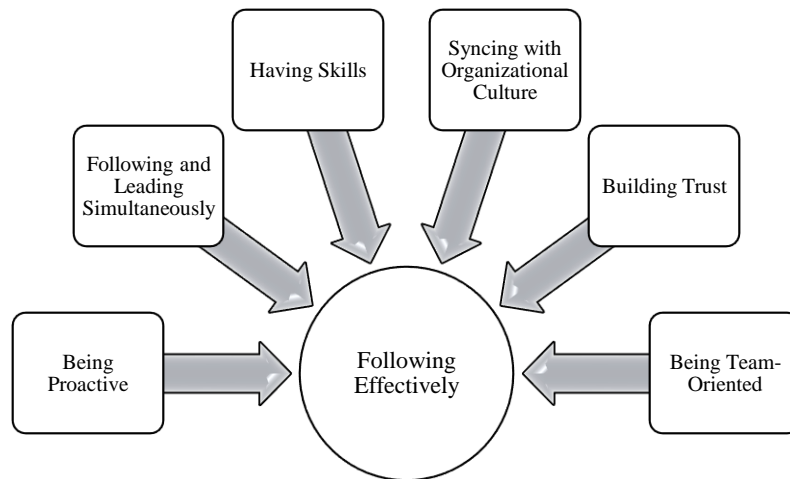
During this step of the analysis, we created individual textual descriptions of participants' experience of the phenomenon that offers 'what' the participant experienced. Moustakas (1994) recommends using verbatim examples to create each description. In the next step of the

analysis, the researcher develops a structural description of the experience that will offer 'how' the participants experienced the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) recommends using textual description and imaginative variation to create structural descriptions. The themes and sub-themes are described, followed by examples of the textual and structural descriptions. Figure 2, 3, 4, and 5 shows the core themes along with related sub-themes. Each figure is followed by the textual and structural description that led to the theme and sub-theme development.

Theme 1: Following Effectively

Figure 2

Theme 1 "Following Effectively" and Related Sub-themes



Textural Description of Theme 1: Following Effectively. All participants mentioned several behaviors when asked to provide a list of ones that are important for them to be effective global followers within their organizations. Jacob said having effective followership behaviors is essential to be successful within the organization. He stated:

"I think the way it is when you create that culture you know the openness and servitude attitude and being able to empathy and trust, it is very important to have that leverage it so that you can drive success and align with your clients, best customers, organizational culture and having that agility and success within the organization."

Being proactive. Three participants talked about the importance of being proactive and entrepreneurial, such as providing inputs about decisions or trying to solve faced issues without waiting for support from leaders. For instance, Erkan said as a follower one should proactively participate in decision-making:

"I mean the organization continuously encourage to speak up, actively participate in the decision-making. [...] You need speak up. You need to proactively put your input. Otherwise, I mean the system doesn't work here."

Following and leading simultaneously. When asked about the influence of organizational culture and structure on his relationship with his leader, Khan expressed that in an open organizational culture, there is a thin line and people mostly act like leaders and followers simultaneously. He said:

"...wherein there is a very thin line between the leaders and the followers. The way

especially in the department I am working or the team I am working all of us are leaders and all of us are followers. The formal titles are a part of organizational hierarchy.”

Having skills. Participants talked about the importance of having technical skills that would enable them to perform their followership effectively. Imran emphasized that having the necessary skills is very important for an effective follower in technology organizations. She stated:

“Going and having business skills and self-skills to sell the services, because really it is hard to sell a service versus selling a product because you can demo it, you can show the client that it is working. So, sell a service, it needs a lot of kind of business skills.”

Syncing with organizational culture. All participants commented on how their organizational culture encourages them to speak up, provide feedback, and proactively contribute to leadership processes. Imran stated:

“My organization has a, what I call, a collaborative culture. It’s a very open culture. Meaning actually up to the executive team, they have an open door policy. Its, you can walk up basically and talk to anybody about anything. It’s very collaborative. [...] That basically impacts the strategy of how we drive our organization.”

Building trust. Five participants mentioned the importance of building trust with their leader or having an organizational culture that embeds trust-building between its members as essential to effective followership. Walter provided an example, saying:

“Also, I always have a weekly one to one with my team members or a bi-weekly one to one with my team members, where I share challenges, which I am getting from my management to have in the team. That could be people reduction that could be a business challenge that could be a challenge that the whole company has, but it builds trust when you share such things early with the team.”

Being team-oriented. Six participants emphasized the importance of being team-oriented and collaborative. For instance, Peyami said that:

“Being open and really wanting to empower the people to be able to talk, to be able to present opinions and be a part of the solution, right. It is not just “hey we have a problem and that how we solve it”. It is we need to solve the problem together. And we need to collaborate.”

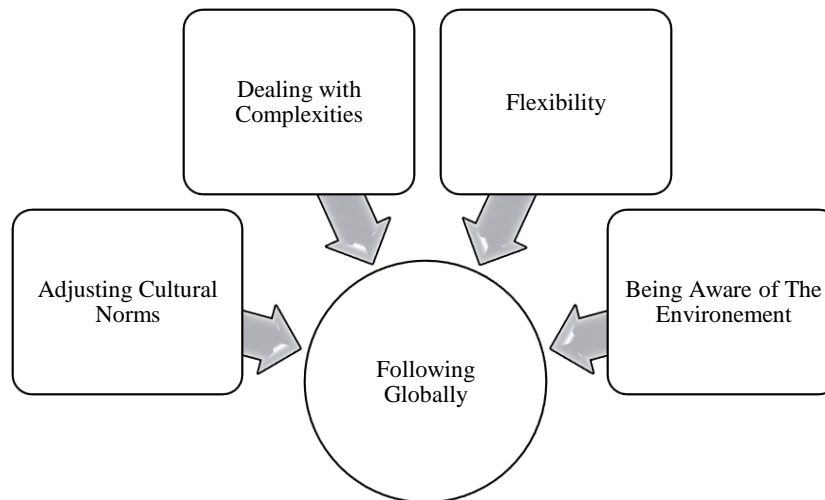
Structural Description of Theme 1: Following Effectively. To be effective in a global organizational context, global followers should proactively engage with their leader and know that proactive followership entails also taking leadership responsibility at the same time. These findings mirror the findings of the followership literature in domestic contexts (see Carsten et al., 2010; Ghias et al., 2018). This requires global followers to have skills that will enable them to show the utmost ability to get the job done as well as be responsive to the organizational culture that encourages them to be effective. To be effective global followers in global technology, organizations must also be able to build relationships based on trust between their

leaders and fellow followers. Effective global followers should be team players and they should give priority to collective effort rather than individual success.

Theme 2: Following Globally

Figure 3

Theme 2 “Following Globally” and Related Sub-themes



Textural Description of Theme 2: Following Globally. All participants mentioned that they interact with many people from different cultures and countries and emphasized the normality of such interactions for global followers. For instance, Khan stated that:

“It happens almost daily basis. [...] Wherein you interact not only with local Qataris, local Arabs or Local Emirates but you also deal with Americans, Australians, or South Africans, or Indians, or Filipinos or Pakistanis. So, it becomes a daily part of it and after a while you get so used to it and you do not even realize you deal with so many different nationalities.”

Adjusting cultural norms. Four participants talked about being able to adjust cultural norms to create relationships as well as effectively conduct business operations in a global environment. When asked about the cultural differences between him and his leader, Peyami said:

“I think, I do have subordinates that are from different cultures, and you have to take those things into consideration. I think my previous boss, the one that just left about two months ago, for people to respect you and for people to want to follow you; I have a belief that you really need to be able to adapt to their culture.”

Dealing with Complexity. All participants reported global environmental diversity in terms of culture and different ways of conducting business operations. Effective followers should be able to deal with environmental complexities in a constructive way. When asked about his daily activities that require him to interact with others from different cultures and countries, Jacob answered:

“Yes, from a perspective sense, since I am from sales and have the actual Americas region, which obviously Canada operates different tone and pace and functionality than

what the US does. And similarly, what we do in Mexico and Ecuador or Argentina and Bolivia, you know they all have different cultural norms and paces as well as the way do business. You got to hint to hear that. And the way it is.”

Flexibility. Four participants also talked about being flexible while interacting with others from different cultures. For instance, Jacob said “*Additionally you got to be flexible. Because there are going to be various different things with your organization, with your people located various different countries and cultural norms.*”

Being aware of the environment. All participants talked about being aware of the external environment while conducting business operations within a global environment. Walter talked about being aware of the external environment and said:

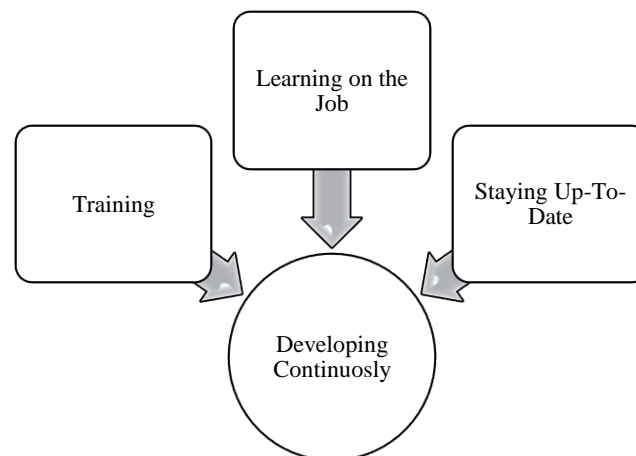
“I know as I am doing business in EMEA [Europe, Middle East, and Africa Region], I know in Italy; I don’t have to do any business between the 5th of August to 15th of September. Because that’s their Ferragosto holidays. In Nordic, I know that I don’t have to do any business between the 1st of July to 15th of August.”

Structural Description of Theme 2: Following Globally. Being an effective global follower in global organizations requires individuals to be aware of the factors that will influence their activities, especially international interactions with people from different countries and cultures. An effective global follower should be able to adjust their cultural norms or adopt other cultures to create relationships. At the same time, an effective global follower should be able to manage the complexities of global environments, such as different ways of doing business, local customs and norms, or time differences. These domains are emphasized in the literature (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). Effective global followers should also be flexible and understand they must be able to accommodate unusual requests like working on a national holiday. Global followers should have multicultural skills including being sensitive to other cultures and being aware of the global environment such as national holidays and religious practices.

Theme 3: Developing Continuously

Figure 4

Theme 3 “Developing Continuously” and Related Sub-themes



Textural Description of Theme 3: Developing Continuously. All participants talked about the importance of seeking opportunities for development from both formal and informal means, including organizational training for development or formal education. Khan talked about how the training he received within the organization helped him with various aspects of his interactions with his leader and his followers. He stated that:

“It did help, you know. Because I will give you one example, where I was called into a training, which is called “best start workshop”, which was very early part of my career in this organization. [...] So, these were all part of those trainings. And it did help to develop these skill sets further or my behavior further.”

Training. Six participants emphasized that their educational training played a role in their development of effective followership behaviors. For instance, Erkan said his higher education degree of “MBA [Master of Business Administration] brought me an overall understanding of business in terms of finance, in terms of strategy, in terms of operations and other functions. So, with the support of an MBA I have had an overall understanding of all business functions.” Two participants also emphasized that continuous technical training is a necessity to be effective in the technology industry.

Learning on the job. When asked about the influence of their formal training on their effective followership behaviors, six participants talked about learning on the job either from their own experiences or learning from their peers. Eddy talked about learning from peers, saying:

“For me personally, a lot of it being source where I actually work from and actually watching my peers and being in at the ground with them and work with my peers as well. I have not been on a training course or that sort of thing. You have to do with these to become a manager.”

Staying up to date. For a continuous development activity to be effective, four participants mentioned that they should stay up to date with both technical expertise and knowledge about the global environment. For instance, Imran noted that:

“I guess you know, the desire to learn. I don’t know how to put the name of the behavior better but like savvy, desire to learn and keep up with the technology and keep up with up to date with everything. I think these are the main behaviors that are crucial to my organization to be successful.”

Khan also stated, “We are also encouraged to be very curious about what is happening in the market, what is happening in the team, what is happening within the global economy and market situations.” Therefore, staying up to date requires both self-development of technical skills and learning about global environmental happenings.

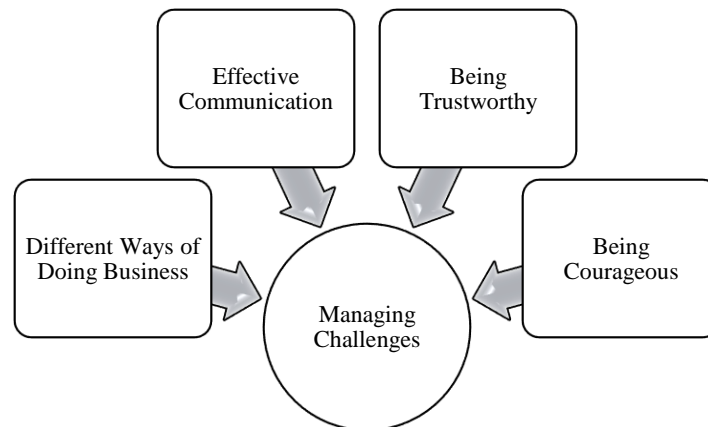
Structural Description of Theme 3: Developing Continuously. Developing global followership behaviors requires both formal or informal training and continuously seeking opportunities for development. Effective global followers participate in organizational training to develop their technical and soft skills, such as sessions on technical issues, leadership, cross-cultural communication, and conflict resolution. Effective global followers learn from their

own experiences throughout their careers, as well as from their peers or mentors within their organizations. Furthermore, global followers stay relevant to their environments and stay up to date with technological developments to be effective in their organizations. Training in these aspects within organizations contributed to the new perspectives on effective global followers and the global followership phenomenon.

Theme 4: Managing Challenges

Figure 5

Theme 4 “Managing Challenges” and Related Sub-theme



Textural Description of Theme 4: Managing Challenges. All participants talked about challenges they face, such as cultural differences in conducting business, cross-cultural communication, and ineffective communication. When asked about a challenge he faced with his leader and how he handled that challenge, Peyami emphasized the importance of being critical and providing facts. He stated that:

“To me, there is never going to be a point where we may agree 100%. But at least if we have the foundation of why the proposal was made, then he can tell me tell me “Well no this part of it isn’t correct.” And then yes, absolutely if I truly believe in something I will stand up and say, “Hey we may disagree” and there have been times where we’ve said “Okay we have to agree to disagree” but ultimately, he is the boss and he gets to make the decision. So, I follow.”

Different ways of doing business. Five participants talked about conducting business within different countries and how it can become a challenge for global followers. Walter talked about being aware of such differences and managing these differences while working with others from two different countries. He described his experience by saying:

“When you are surfing such a big territory like myself from South Africa to some real basic counties in Africa like Nicaragua, Ghana and then high deep technical territories in Russia or something, you have to adjust your style to each country. The South African will approach me on business related questions.”

Effective communication. Followers were asked about the effect of structure on their relationship with leaders. All participants stated that, regardless of their organizational structure such as flat, hierarchical, or matrix organizational structure, they were able to speak up about

their concerns or manage a conflict because of their organizational culture. For instance, Walter said:

“But because on each hierarchical level, you have to formulate the message in a much tighter framework in order to get a decision.... [For example] I have a pricing, exceptional request and I put it to my manager. Then I gave him training and the message gets sharpened as it goes up. I can be a little more loose on the message when the skip level manager doesn’t approve the pricing and I find it very very important for my customer, I still can go for the skip-skip level manager but then I must be ready to have all my things lined up and have my messaging sharpened for the skip-skip level manager.”

Being trustworthy. Three participants talked about building trust between their leaders and followers as an important aspect of effective followership. When asked how to build trust in an organizational context Jacob stated:

“I think that the thing is when they see that you are collaborating and doing the thing that is in line with the culture but also challenging the things that don’t make sense. That shows you are genuine and your ability to do the things they want to do in the way they want to it with a followership type mentality but additionally say “Okay, we are in line here” and then there is something that there is a difference or perspective you say “Okay, can you tell me more about that can you explain why you think that’s the best way to do it.” And when you have this type of openness and dialogue, it creates that trust and builds it.”

Being courageous. When specifically asked about challenging leaders to achieve better outcomes, three participants mentioned being courageous and challenging the status quo as essential to being an effective follower and increasing organizational outcomes. Khan stated,

“Absolutely. Because at the end of the day, you are still employed by somebody else. You are still reporting to somebody, right. And if you are not courageous enough to express your opinion even no matter what kind of open culture and open environment you have it won’t help you. So, you still need to have certain courage to open your mouth and stand up for your own opinion.”

Structural Description of Theme 4: Managing Challenges. Global followers will face a variety of internal and external challenges during their daily activities, such as cultural differences in conducting business and cross-cultural communication. Effective global followers manage to do business in different cultures by learning the norms, adopting other cultures’ practices, or taking precautions to sustain their business operations. Being an effective global follower requires effective communication skills from two perspectives. First, effective global followers ensure that their message is forwarded fully and clearly. Second, effective global followers are aware of the potential pitfalls of virtually communicating and ensure they are open, accurate, and transparent in their virtual communications. It is a common practice to be in a virtual team in global organizations, where most of the communication happens within virtual communication tools. To be effective, global followers should develop a relationship with their leaders based on trust. Such trust requires global followers to be transparent and open

with their leaders even though they need to courageously challenge their leaders' decisions when it enhances organizational outcomes. This pattern is consistent with the followership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). For global followers, openness with leaders and constructively challenging leaders' decisions builds trust.

Synthesis of Data

The final step of data analysis was synthesis, which is the integration of the composite textural descriptions and the composite structural descriptions into a synthesis of the lived experience of the phenomenon for the entire sample. The researcher constructs a composite textural-structural description of the essence of the experiences by incorporating the invariant constituents and themes that will represent the sample as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). In synthesis, four core themes and their sub-themes provide a universal common experience and essence of being a global follower in a global technology organization.

Global followership requires individuals to proactively participate in the decision-making processes and take responsibility to achieve higher levels of team and organizational success. This process also requires followers to act as leaders, when necessary, to sync with an organizational culture that encourages followers to speak up, and to seek training to develop effective followership behaviors. Khan stated:

“So, this is a very open culture and very open behavior, wherein there is a very thin line between the leaders and the followers. The way especially in the department I am working or the team I am working [is that] all of us are leaders and all of us are followers. The formal titles are a part of organizational hierarchy.”

The diversity of the global environment forces global followers to adjust toward being culturally sensitive and flexible while dealing with complex differences. Jacob stated, *“...you got to be flexible. Because there are going to be various different things with your organization, with your people located various different countries and cultural norms.”*

Training for continuous development is an essential part of being an effective global follower, where different forms of training such as education, organizational training, and on-the-job learning would sufficiently help followers to develop effective followership behaviors. Imran stated:

“I guess you know, the desire to learn. I don't know how to put the name of the behavior better but like savvy, desire to learn and keep up with the technology and [stay] up to date with everything. I think these are the main behaviors that are crucial to my organization to be successful.”

Courageously dealing with organizational and environmental challenges with effective communication skills while being trustworthy is one of the essential aspects of effective global followership in global organizations. Khan stated that if *“...you are not courageous enough to express your opinion that even no matter what kind of open culture and open environment you have, it won't help you. So, you still need to have certain courage...and stand up for your own opinion.”*

Discussion

In line with Tolstikov-Mast's (2016) call for further investigation of the global followership phenomenon, this study took the first step toward understanding the lived experiences of global followers. The participants provided rich insights about their lived experiences as global followers, on how to develop effective global followership behaviors within global technology organizations, and shared insights about the influence of global organizational context and cultural differences of individuals. According to these results, the global followership phenomenon's four major aspects are a) effectively participating in the co-construction of the global leadership process, b) a global context, c) continuous development, and d) managing challenges. The results suggest that the multidimensional global context frames the way leadership and followership are conceptualized and enacted is critical in interpreting the global leader-global follower relationships and global leadership process. The results revealed that global followership differs from followership in a domestic context not only due to cultural diversity that is present in a global organizational context that influences leaders' and followers' behaviors toward each other but also the multiplicity, complexity, ambiguity, and flux of business operations that are present in global environment that demands ability to show versatility from global followers to fulfill the requirements of complex global leader-global follower relationships and task responsibilities to co-construct global leadership processes and influence global leadership outcomes.

While domestic followership may involve diverse people within a society, leading and following across different societies has unique socio-cultural implications that may dramatically change the dynamics of the relationship between leader and follower, including fundamental assumptions about what it means to be a follower, and the effective communication and trust building behaviors, which are critical to create healthy leader-follower relationship are involved. This creates an opportunity to expand existing the theoretical model of global followership by Tolstikov-Mast (2016) to include specific predominant global followership behaviors 'Building Trust' and 'Effective Communication' for global followers to be able to be involved in a bidirectional influential relationship with their global leaders and therefore create opportunities to actively participate into global leadership processes. Baker et al.'s (2016) study on followers in the United States revealed that taking leadership responsibility requires courageous communication and building trust with leaders. One current participant's response to handling challenges that influenced his following behaviors and his support to leadership was taking initiative while dealing with his customers; this was reflected findings of Baker et al. (2016). Participants also emphasized that global followers build trust with their leaders, describing it as a critical requirement for building high-quality leader-follower relationships that allow followers to impact the behaviors of their leaders (Shahzadi et al., 2017). Consistent with this, several participants discussed how being able to build trust is a challenge that needs to be overcome by leaders and followers to be effective global followers. Participants also talked about the importance of managing challenges that are caused by the global environment, such as different ways of doing business, intercultural communication or creating relationships with others from different cultures.

The findings of this study supported the assumptions of Uhl-Bien et al.'s (2014) followership theory. In followership theory, the leadership process approach acknowledges that in different

times managers can also follow and might not lead, while subordinates can also lead and might not follow. According to participants of this study, being able to form flexible partnerships with leaders within the complex global environment is another important aspect of effective global followership and global followers are actively taking leadership responsibilities while performing their duties. The findings suggest that a global followership model that depends on empirical knowledge would include 'taking leadership responsibility' as one of the characteristics of global followership.

Participants revealed that being an effective global follower in global organizations requires individuals to be aware of their global environment, which involves a variety of components, including complexity and intercultural interactions. Effective global followers should then act accordingly. Individuals in global organizations need to be aware of the global environment and its dynamics to be effective and successful (Mendenhall et al., 2018). For instance, one participant mentioned the different national holidays and how this environmental factor influences the ability to conduct business operations. Participants also described effective global followers as skillful and proactive individuals who take the lead when necessary to increase team and organizational outcomes. Carsten et al. (2010) revealed that followers' proactive self-schemas in a given organizational context are affected by contextual variables, such as leadership styles (e.g., authoritarian or supportive/empowering) and organizational climate (e.g., bureaucratic/hierarchical or empowering). Participants explained their leaders' influence on their own behaviors; such statements were consistent with Carsten et al.'s (2010) findings that leaders' empowerment and encouragement to speak up positively influenced their proactivity.

Participants emphasized that putting team success is a priority to be an effective global follower. It is common for individuals in global organizations to be part of teams that are characterized by diversity in terms of people, culture, and task complexity (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). In such teams, contextual elements such as industrial, organizational, group, and professional and national cultures become relevant to global leadership processes and global organizations need exemplary and courageous leader-follower partnerships. Lemoine and Blum (2013) also found that in today's organizations, team success heavily depends on leaders' and followers' joint efforts and partnerships rather than leaders alone. Therefore, the team orientation of global followers becomes an important driver of effective global followership. For instance, in global multicultural teams, effective team communication enables team members to share their diverse viewpoints, discuss problems, and answer questions that are specifically important considering in such teams the lack of shared situational sense-making due to the cultural diversity of team members and not having common cultural value system between team member (Lisak & Erez, 2009).

Regarding global organizational context, participants explained that global organizational culture encourages them to adopt effective communication skills toward their leaders; these include speaking up, providing feedback, and proactively contributing to decision-making processes. They also described how they are encouraged to attend internal developmental activities within their organizations to become effective global followers. Similar to global organizations, globally, organizations in domestic contexts also train their people to increase their effectiveness and organizational commitment (Dias & Silva, 2016). All participants reported that organizational culture enables them to manage a variety of challenges they face

during daily activities. The context of where the following occurs greatly influences these global followers' behaviors. These results are consistent with previous followership research. For instance, Carsten et al. (2010) revealed that followers' proactive behaviors regarding voicing their concerns are directly related to the support of organizational culture to such behaviors. The findings of this study revealed that organizational culture does enable global followers to proactively voice their concerns. Similarly, Ghias et al. (2018) revealed that followers would show courageous behaviors in organizations where organizational culture welcomes such behaviors. The findings of this study revealed that organizational culture motivates global followers to behave courageously. Warrick (2017) also emphasized that organizational culture significantly influences an organization's performance and effectiveness, the morale and performance of its employees, and its ability to motivate and attract people. Parallel to these aspects, several participants stated the culture of their organization was the reason why they joined their organization. However, Tolstikov-Mast (2016) and Chaleff (2009) also emphasized the importance of the development of courageous skills, such as challenging leaders' decisions by voicing concerns and taking initiatives as a key aspect of followership that will help followers to effectively contribute to the partnership process with their leaders. As one of the participants mentioned, without enough courage to speak your mind the organizational culture alone would not be enough for a global follower to participate in the decision-making processes or manage challenges. One consideration of acting courageously and speaking up is how people react to such behaviors may be different in different cultures. The courage to speak up may depend on the power distance whether or how you speak up (Chaleff, 2009). According to the GLOBE study, power distance is defined as "the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally" (Shi & Wang, 2010). Therefore, global followers should consider the culture's influence while speaking up and the potential differences in reactions they may receive from their leaders.

Participants in this study also talked about dealing with environmental complexities such as cultural differences and differences in value systems while conducting business operations. Global organizations need effective global followers who can deal with such complexities to overcome environmental challenges (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). Four sources define today's complex global business environments: multiplicity, complexity, ambiguity, and flux. These sources force global followers to deal with different stakeholders and value systems; they also increase dependency on different components of global organizational contexts, such as virtual teamwork, that create higher expectations in terms of performance and skill sets. The global environment also forces global followers to perform their duties with a lack of clear information, and potential multiple interpretations of the same fact due to cross-cultural differences in a global context. Global followers are forced to adopt the fluctuations of the global environment characterized by a continuous shifting of system dynamics, values, organizational structure, industry trends, and sociopolitical stability (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

The participants pointed out that continuous self-development is very important to be an effective global follower, naming such strategies as organizational training, on-the-job learning, and staying up to date. Perhaps the most significant or contradictory finding of the present study is the revelation that internal training activities that global followers receive assist their development of effective global followership behaviors even though these training

activities do not specifically aim to develop global followership behaviors. Four participants mentioned that the training activities they attended at their organizations helped them to develop global followership behaviors. For instance, one participant provided an example of how mandatory training he received helped him to develop his cross-cultural communication competency which is essential to be an effective global follower. However, it is also true that several participants stated that their formal education also helped them develop effective followership behaviors. Even though leadership literature suggests that educating leadership students about followership is a missing part of leadership education (Murji, 2015), participants talked about how their higher education helped them to be effective global followers. To be effective global followers several participants talked about the importance of on-the-job learning for continuous development which mirrored McCall's (1998) statement that on-the-job experiences often shape executive development by on-the-job learning. Even though McCall's statement is about executive development, it has similar implications for global follower development. Several participants provided examples of how they learned from their own experiences. One participant brought another perspective to on-the-job learning by stating that learning from others within the same organization was an important aspect of continuous development. Puteh et al.'s (2015) findings revealed that peers and senior co-workers certainly play an important part and influence their junior co-workers' development.

Regarding the influence of their national culture on their behaviors and intercultural interactions, participants emphasized that interacting with others from different cultures is a part of their daily activities; they need to be adaptive to others' cultural norms to be effective. Participants also talked about how their cross-cultural experiences were pivotal in their development into effective global followers. The findings of this study corroborated the literature that states individuals' culture influences global followers' behaviors and therefore plays an important role in global followership development processes. One such example is Casimir et al.'s (2006) study where the authors revealed that Australian followers reported higher levels of trust in their leaders than Chinese followers. The authors discussed that high power distance in Chinese culture and low power distance in Australian culture might be the reason for the findings. The findings of the current study revealed that global followers' own culture influences their behaviors, which they adjust to adopt cultural differences to create relationships and be effective.

To be able to follow effectively in a global organizational context, participants talked about different strategies and behaviors necessary to be effective, such as adjusting their own cultural norms, dealing with complexities, being flexible while interacting with others from different cultures, and being aware of the global environment. From the environmental perspective, such behaviors would not be needed to be effective in a given domestic organizational context because in domestic organizations followers would not face such specific challenges of the global environment. For instance, it is expected that in domestic settings, environmental factors such as national holidays, time zones (except countries that have very big geographies such as the United States or Australia) or ways of conducting business operations would not show differences. From an intercultural interaction perspective, followers in domestic settings might still need to adopt similar strategies and behaviors within countries that are known for diversity, such as the United States or Dubai where domestic organizations have people from diverse cultures. Parrotta et al. (2014) stated that many developed countries experienced a change in

their workforce composition that increased heterogeneity and diversity. This trend increased cross-cultural interactions within the organizations in these developed countries. On the other hand, in countries that do not have diverse populations in terms of culture, domestic followers would not need intercultural skills.

Even though it is a known fact that cultural differences of individuals influence their relationships with their leaders and followers (Shi & Wang, 2010; Hofstede, 2011), it was not clear how cultural differences would influence the relationships between global leaders and their global followers (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). The participants talked about how such differences usually enrich their relationship and that they can manage these differences by adopting the cultural norms of others. In order to be successful, avoid cultural misunderstandings, and motivate followers, Anbari et al. (2009) emphasized that managers in global organizations should be culturally sensitive. Several participants of this study also provided insights about being culturally sensitive and considered while overcoming cultural differences.

In contrast to the enriching effects of cultural differences, some participants also talked about the challenging aspects of cross-cultural interactions. Lisak and Erez (2009) asserted that leaders and followers face challenges in communication while working in multicultural teams, but effective communication allows for critical discussion involving diverse perspectives. Effective communication was also one of the main concerns for almost all participants of the current study. As mentioned before, differences in language, nonverbal communication, negotiation, and forms of agreement are four points of cross-cultural miscommunication that individuals most likely will face in cross-cultural interactions (Rifkin, 2006). Several participants talked about the communicative challenges they faced and provided examples of cultural differences and how these differences sometimes negatively influence their relationship due to the communication styles that both leaders and followers have.

The present study provides a data-driven explanation of how global followers develop their effective followership behaviors that can be used and utilized by both global followership and global leadership scholars. The descriptions of participants' own experiences toward becoming effective global followers provide valuable insights into the existing literature on the newly emerging global followership phenomenon and how global followers develop their behaviors to proactively participate in the co-construction process of global leadership within global technology organizations. Since global followership is a newly emerging phenomenon, qualitative exploration was the first step of the investigation. Future research could explore each of the behaviors presented by the participants more deeply within global technology organizations by using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches. Further exploration and investigation of these behaviors would reveal valuable insights into the co-construction process of global leadership within global technology organizations.

Future research could also explore the global followership phenomenon within different global organizational contexts such as global non-profits, global non-government organizations or global organizations in different industries. The experiences of global followers in these contexts might show differences and might reveal other important global followership behaviors or development pathways as well as their contributions to the co-construction of global leadership processes.

Future research could also explore the exact influence of current global leadership training's influence on global followership behaviors and development. In a global economy, organizations around the globe recognize the importance of organizational training to attract and motivate their people to achieve success, prepare for the future, and obtain market leadership (Dias & Silva, 2016). The present study demonstrated that global followers at global technology organizations receive organizational training that helps them develop effective global followership behaviors, even though these trainings are not explicitly named or aimed for global followership development. Future research could explore the specific effects of such training and provide insights about their specific influence on global followers and potential modifications of such training to develop effective global followers.

Lastly, future research could investigate and explore global follower-global leader dyads to present perspectives of both parties on effective global followership behaviors. The present study explored the experiences of global followers and the participants' own perceptions of their leaders and their behaviors. It would be interesting to get insights from global leaders and the perspectives of their global followers, which would also allow researchers to crosscheck relational dynamics and claims made by each party.

The present study provides several implications for global followers, global leaders, and global organizations. Future global followers could learn the developmental pathways presented by the participants and try to train themselves to be effective global followers and contribute to global leadership processes. Global leaders could also learn from the findings of this study to try to foster global followers who would help them enhance global leadership outcomes. Such understanding would lead to better organizational outcomes and therefore help global organizations to be successful in global environments. Lastly, global organizations could use the findings of the present study to develop specific global followership development activities or training to develop effective global followers and enhance global leadership outcomes in their organizations. For instance, global organizations can create an educational training session using the present study findings to inform global leaders about global followership phenomenon, specific global followership behaviors revealed by this study's findings, key aspects of global followership development within global organizations, and global organizational context's role and influence on global follower and global leader relational dynamics.

Limitations

The present study explored the global followership phenomenon via the qualitative transcendental phenomenological method. The transcendental phenomenological approach provides a description of the overall essence of participants' experiences by using their own words that would be limited to their experiences and context (Moustakas, 1994). The targeted participants of this study were individuals who work at global for-profit technology organizations and who hold mid-level managerial positions. A study conducted in a different global organizational context such as global non-profit, or non-government organizations or global organizations in a different industry might reveal different results. However, the goal of examining detailed processes of how global followership is experienced was successful.

The second limitation of the study is the global followers provided information and perspectives about their leaders based on their self-interpretations and these interpretations

were subjective and needed support from actual leaders. The results might have been different if data were collected by global leader-global follower dyads.

The third limitation of the study is out of seven participants there was only one female participant in the sample. The results and experiences provided by the participants would have been different if more female participants provided their experiences.

Conclusion

As this study is believed to be the first empirical study of global followers, the findings of this study revealed that global followers are contributing to the co-construction process of global leadership, and their ability to contribute is influenced by global contextual variables. The results revealed that global followership differs from followership in the domestic context due to cross-cultural interactions global followers engage in fulfilling their daily responsibilities, and the global environment that increases the complexity of business operations that demands global followers to be versatile in terms of creating relationships and fulfilling tasks while contributing the co-construction process of global leadership at their organizations. In order to co-construct the global leadership process with global leaders, global followers should show certain prominent behaviors that include being trustworthy and building trust with their leaders, communicating effectively with leaders and others in cross-cultural settings, taking leadership responsibility when it is needed, being flexible, adopting others' cultural norms, being aware of the global environment, and developing continuously.

The findings revealed that in order to show effective global followership behaviors, a global organizational context that flourishes such behaviors is essential for global followers to participate in the co-construction process of global leadership. The findings revealed that global organizations should create an empowering and motivating organizational context where global followers can voice their concerns, provide feedback to their leaders, resume leadership responsibility in times of need, and proactively participate in decision-making processes without negative consequences. Regarding intercultural interactions, the findings of the present study revealed that individuals' behaviors are culturally bound, and cultural differences sometimes create a challenge in terms of relationship and task complexity for global followers as such differences sometimes bring richness of perspective. The most prominent behaviors participants talked about regarding intercultural interactions were cross-cultural communication, adjusting cultural norms, building trust, and creating relationships. Furthermore, the findings of this study also revealed that, in contrast to current literature on global followership that asserts that there is a lack of developmental training on global followership, the findings revealed that training global followers received within their organizations helped them develop effective global followership behaviors, even though these training activities did not name or directly aim for global followership development.

Another contribution of this study is the clarification of the global followership concept at global organizations that will help future researchers to make informed choices while further exploring the global followership phenomenon at global organizations. Global followers are different from employees who are working at global organizations. Global followers are individuals who are actively engaging in decision-making processes, taking initiative, voicing their concerns, and opposing leaders' decisions in contrast to employees who could be submissive and obedient. Such clarification would provide the basis for future researchers to

select individuals who willingly chose to act as global followers based upon such behaviors to further investigate global followership in a global organizational context.

The recommendations of this study assist future global followers with activities participants provided toward developing into effective global followers. The participants described effective global followership behaviors as being proactive, following and leading simultaneously, having skills, building trust, syncing with organizational culture, being team-oriented, dealing with complexities, being flexible, adjusting cultural norms, being aware of the environment, learning on the job, staying up to date, being trustworthy, effective communication and being courageous. The recommendation of this study also assists future global leaders in how to foster and develop global followers as well as enable them to participate in global leadership processes. Lastly, the recommendation of this study assists global technology organizations by providing data on the importance of creating a welcoming culture for global followers as well as toward creating new training activities and modifying current activities that would develop their employees into effective global followers.

Declarations

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

Funding Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Citation to this article

Hocagil, A. (2024). Exploring global followership phenomenon in global organizational context: A study of global followers within global technology companies. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 13(2), 313-343. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2024.60414>

Rights and Permissions



© 2024 Canadian Institute for Knowledge Development. All rights reserved.

International Journal of Organizational Leadership is published by the Canadian Institute for Knowledge Development (CIKD). This is an open-access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](#) License, which permits use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

References

- Anbari, F. T., Khilkhanova, E. V., Romanova, M. V., Ruggia, M., Tsay, H.-H., & Umpleby, S. A. (2009). *Managing cross-cultural differences in projects* [Paper presentation]. The PMI® Global Congress 2009, Orlando, FL, USA.
- Avolio, J. B., Walumbwa, O. F., & Weber J. T. (2009). Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *The Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 421–49. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163621>
- Baker, S. D., Mathis, C. J., Stites-Doe, S., & Javadian, G. (2016). The role of trust and communication in fostering followers' self-perceptions as leaders. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 28(3/4), 210–230.
- Bjugstad, K., Thach, E. C., Thompson, K. J., & Morris, A. (2006). A fresh look at followership: A model for matching followership and leadership styles. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, 7(3), 304–311. <https://doi.org/10.21818/001c.16673>
- Casimir, G., Waldman, D., Bartram, T., & Yang, S. (2006). Trust and the relationship between leadership and follower performance: Opening the black box in Australia and China. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 12, 72–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107179190601200305>
- Chaleff, I. (2009). *The courageous follower: Standing up to and for our leaders* (3rd ed.). Berrett-Koehler.
- Canals, J. (2014). Global leadership development, strategic alignment and CEOs commitment. *Journal of Management Development*, 33(5), 487–502. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-02-2014-0014>
- Carsten, M. K., & Lapierre, M.L. (2014). *Followership: What is it and why do people follow*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Carsten, M. K., Uhl-Bien, M., West, B. J., Patera, J., L., & McGregor, R. (2010). Exploring social constructions of followership: A qualitative study. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21, 543–562. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.03.015>
- Cascio, W. F., & Montealegre, R. (2016). How technology is changing work and organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, 349–375. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062352>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dias, L. A., & Silva, E. R. (2016). Organizational training and organizational commitment: A literature review and conceptual development. *International Journal of Innovative Science, Engineering & Technology*, 3(1), 387–399.
- Dusek, G. A., Yurova, Y. V., & Ruppel, C. P. (2015). Using social media and targeted snowball sampling to survey a hard-to-reach population: A case study. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 10, 279–299. <https://doi.org/10.28945/2296>
- Epitropaki, O., & Martin, R. (2004). Implicit leadership theories in applied settings: Factor structure, generalizability, and stability over time. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(2), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.2.293>
- Ghias, W., Hassan, S., & Masood, T. M. (2018). Does courageous followership contribute to exemplary leadership practices: Evidence from Pakistan? *Research Journal of Business Management*, 13(1), 11–21.
- Han, S., Harold M. C., & Cheong, M. (2019). Examining why employee proactive personality influences empowering leadership: The roles of cognition- and affect-based trust. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 92(2), 352–383. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12252>
- Hancock, M. E., Amankwaa, L., Revell, M. A., & Mueller, D. (2016). Focus group data saturation: A new approach to data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(11), 2124–2130.
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>
- Hogg, M. A. (2001). A social identity theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(3), 184–200. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0503_1
- Huesing, T., & Ludema, D. J. (2017). The nature of global leaders' work. In Joyce S. Osland, Ming Li, Mark E. Mendenhall (Ed.), *Advances in global leadership*, 10, 3–39, Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1535-120320170000010001>
- Ibarra, H., Wittman, S., Petriglieri, G., & Day, V. D. (2014). Leadership and identity: An examination of three theories and new research directions. In D. Day (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of leadership and organizations* (pp. 285-304). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199755615.013.015>
- Javidan, M., Bullough, A. & Dibble, R. (2016). Mind the gap: Gender differences in global leadership self-efficacies. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 30(1). <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2015.0035>

- Jones, T. M., & Millar, C. (2010). About global leadership and global ethics, and a possible moral compass: An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 93, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0622-y>
- Kellerman, B. (2008). *Followership: How followers are creating change and changing leaders*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Kelley, R. E. (1988). In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review*, 66(6), 141–148.
- Kilburn, B. R. (2010). Who are we leading? Identifying effective followers: A review of typologies. *International Journal of The Academic Business World*, 4(1), 9–17.
- Kim, J., & McLean, G. N. (2015). An integrative framework for global leadership competencies: Levels and Dimensions. *Human Resource Development International*, 18(3), 235–258. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2014.1003721>
- Lawrence III, O. T. (2017). *Followership in a global context: Examining the relationship between Chinese national culture and followers role orientation* [Doctoral dissertation]. Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No.10264888)
- Lemoine, J. G., & Blum, C., T. (2013). The power of followership: How subordinate characteristics moderate leader-performance relationships. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 2013 (1), 17050. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2013.17050abstract>
- Lisak, A., & Erez, M. (2009). Leaders and followers in multi-cultural teams: Their effects on team communication, team identity and team effectiveness. *Proceeding of the 2009 international workshop on Intercultural Collaboration- IWIC'09*, New York, USA. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1499224.1499238>
- Lord, R. G., Brown, D. J., Harvey, J. L., & Hall, R. J. (2001). Contextual constraints on prototype generation and their multilevel consequences for leadership perceptions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12(3), 311–338. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(01\)00081-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00081-9)
- McCall Jr., M. W. (1988). Developing executives through work experiences. *Human Resource Planning*, 11(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.35613/ccl.1988.1090>
- Meindl, J. R., Ehrlich, S. B., & Dukerich, J. M. (1985). The romance of leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30, 78–102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392813>
- Mendenhall, E. M. (2018) Leadership, and the birth of global leadership. In E. M. Mendenhall J. Osland, A. Bird, G. R. Oddou, S. Stevens, M. L. Maznevski, & G. K. Stahl (Eds.), *Global leadership: Research, practice and development* (pp. 3-27). Routledge.
- Mendenhall, E. M., & Osland, J. S. (2002). *Mapping the terrain of the global leadership construct*. [Paper presentation]. The academy of International Business, Puerto Rico, June 29.
- Mendenhall, E. M., Osland, J., Bird, A., Oddou, G. R., Stevens, S., Maznevski, M. L., & Stahl, G. K. (2018) (Eds.), *Global leadership: Research, practice and development* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Mendenhall, E. M., Reiche, B. S., Bird, A., & Osland, S. J. (2012) Defining the 'global' in global leadership. *Journal of World Business*, 47(4), 493–503. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.003>
- Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of organization*. Sage Publications.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Murji, S. (2015). Taking followership education to the next level. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 14(3), 168–177. <https://doi.org/10.12806/V14/I3/I1>
- Nonyonga, C. R. (2015). *Leadership, Followership, and the Context: An Integrative Examination of Nursing Leadership in Uganda* [Doctoral dissertation]. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3663649)
- Oc, B., & Bashshur, M. R. (2013). Followership, leadership, and social influence. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 24(6), 919–934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.10.006>
- Osland, J. S., Oddou, G., Bird, A., & Osland, A. (2013). Exceptional global leadership as cognitive expertise in the domain of global change. *European Journal of International Management* 7(5), 517–534. <https://doi.org/10.1504/EJIM.2013.056475>
- Parrotta, P., Pozzoli, D., & Pytlikova, M. (2014). The nexus between labor diversity and firm's innovation. *Journal of Population Economics*, 27 (2), 303–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-013-0491-7>
- Pless, N. M., Maak, T., & Stahl, G. K. (2011). Developing responsible global leaders through international service-learning programs: The Ulysses experience. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(2), 237–260. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.10.2.zqr237>

- Puteh, F., Kaliannan, M., & Alam, N. (2015). Learning for professional development via peers: A system theory approach. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 172 (27), 88–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.340>
- QSR International. (2017). *QSR NVivo 12*. <http://www.qsrinternational.com>
- Reiche, B. S., Bird A., Mendenhall, E. M., & Osland S. J. (2017). Contextualizing leadership: A typology of global leadership roles. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48(5), 552–572. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-016-0030-3>
- Rifkin, G. (2006). Building better global managers. *Harvard Management Update*, 11(3), 1508–1519.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Riggio, R. E., Lowe, K. B., & Carsten, M. K. (2014). Followership theory: A review and research agenda. *Leadership Quarterly*, 25(1), 83–104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.007>
- Schuder, K. L. (2016). Using followership to develop new leadership in cultures with greater power distance. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 10(3), 58–61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21495>
- Shahzadi, G., John, A., Qadeer, F., & Mehnaz, S. (2017). Followership behavior and leaders' trust: Do political skills matter? *Pakistan Journal of Commerce & Social Sciences*, 11(2), 653–670.
- Shamir, B. (2007). From passive recipients to active co-producers: Followers' roles in the leadership process. In B. Shamir, R. Pillai, M. Bligh, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.) *Follower-Centered Perspectives on Leadership: A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl*, (pp. 9-39). Information Age Publishers.
- Shi, X., & Wang, J. (2010). Interpreting Hofstede model and GLOBE Model: Which way to go for cross-cultural research? *International Journal of Business and Management*, 6(5), 93–99. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v6n5p93>
- Tolstikov-Mast, Y. (2016). Global followership: The launch of the scholarly journey. In S. J. Osland, M. Li, & E. M. Mendenhall (Eds.), *Advances in global leadership*, 9, 109–150. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1535-12032016000009013>
- Tompson, H. B., & Tompson, G. H. (2013). The focus of leadership development in MNCs. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 8(1), 6–14.
- Van der Zee, K., & Van Oudenhoven, J. P. (2000). The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire: A multidimensional instrument of multicultural effectiveness. *European Journal of Personality*, 14, 291–309. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0984\(200007/08\)14:4<291::AID-PER377>3.0.CO;2-6](https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0984(200007/08)14:4<291::AID-PER377>3.0.CO;2-6)
- Warrick, D. D. (2017). What leaders need to know about organizational culture? *Business Horizons*, 60(3), 395–404. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.01.011>