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Followership in Leadership Process and Organizational Performance: A Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

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Extant literature on the construct of leadership process has laid a lot of emphasis on the characteristics and behaviors of the individual leader. The attention paid on followership in the process and its role in realizing organizational outcomes is limited. This paper specifically examined through systematic literature review the twin elements of the leadership process: influence and motivation; and how leaders and followers enact them among themselves for enhanced organizational performance. The review involved search of relevant literature in published books and peer reviewed articles in various databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Sage, Emerald, ProQuest, EBSCO, and Science Direct. In total, 25 published works and 57 journal articles were reviewed in the study. Scholars have already linked leadership with organizational performance but have overly been biased in the scope of focus on the leadership process dimension. From the review of the extant conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature, this study raised various issues presenting a case for a new conceptual model to further the existing understanding on leadership process and organizational performance. An integrated conceptual framework linking leadership process and organizational performance considering the critical role of followership and organizational contexts is proposed. The emerging theoretical propositions upon which future research can be conducted for practical purposes are discussed.

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A key concern in the extant literature is the lack of consensus among scholars on understanding the construct of leadership (Daft, 2015; Northouse, 2019; Yukl, 2013). Since Burns (1978, as cited in Daft, 2015) inferred leadership as “one of the least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 4), there seems to be no change. A major controversy is persistent confusion regarding aspects that characterize the leadership process. Many scholars have viewed leadership from a leader-centered perspective, and only recently has research changed to follower-centered

approaches (Avolio, 2007; Davila et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2020). Even with this development, Yang et al. argue that the follower-centered research has not completely been relieved of the perspective of leaders. Given the potential benefits that attention on leadership as a process holds, the present situation represents a gap in theory with implications on practice.

Followership has not sufficiently been perceived as a solution or means to deal with organizational failures (Bullington, 2016; Daft, 2015). According to Web of Science (2018; as cited in Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019), only 8% of all articles published at the end of 2017 in *The Leadership Quarterly* journal used the term “follower” in their title, compared to 83% that used the term “leader”. This represents a conceptual gap given that followers “play a more active role in leadership, empowering the leader and influencing his or her behavior, ultimately determining the consequences of the leadership relationship” (Howell & Shamir, 2005, as cited in Avolio, 2007, p. 26). Holloway (2012) argued that positive interactions with followers lead to the success of many leadership responsibilities. Further, Chaleff (2009) posits that organizations can develop strong relationships with clear promise of impressive organizational outcomes by having powerful followers who actively support powerful leaders.

The management of organizational contexts, especially the relationships with the external environment, is a critical factor in conceptualizing leadership as a process. Aguinis (2011, as cited in Wu et al., 2015) observed that little attention has been given to the relationship between leadership and "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations" (p. 819). Despite great insights in current leadership theories, the prevalent picture of the leadership process in relation to external factors is partial. Therefore, there is a need to integrate into the extant work more insights from academic discoveries the role played by factors within and outside of the organization and their impact on performance.

Lastly, issues relating to the relationship between the leadership process and organizational performance have been raised (Muthimi & Kilika, 2018). Literature on the relationship has focused on the traits, behavior, influence, and relationships the leader exhibits, leaving out other critical factors in the complex process. Considering that organizations exist to jointly share in the benefits of achieving goals and leverage on the process of leadership (Gini & Green, 2014; Robbins, 1990; Wei et al., 2014), an integrated approach linking all the requisite factors needs further exploration and development.

This paper explores literature to consider how followership in the leadership process is constructed for organizational performance. The overall objectives were to review extant conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature on the construct of leadership process in the context of an organization and propose a suitable conceptual framework. Testable propositions were advanced based on the conceptualization. The study is significant given the concept of leadership continues to attract a lot of academic enquiry. Further, findings will shed more light on the relationships between leadership process, followership, organizational contexts, and organizational performance. This is critical as practice demands that organizations apply the “full scope of leadership for optimal outcomes” (Daft, 2015, p. 21).

Method

This study employed a systematic desk review searching for relevant information from extant theoretical and empirical studies. Articles relating to the key constructs of leadership, leadership process, influence, motivation, followership, organizational contexts and organizational performance were identified from peer-reviewed journal articles. In addition to 25 scholarly works, 57 journal articles published between 1998 and 2020 were reviewed. Twenty-six journal articles were given more preference because they were either published within the last five years or showed clear interrelationships amongst the study variables. As a construct with a fast-evolving conceptualization and attracting much scholarly attention, leadership studies need reviews from more recent studies for the latest discoveries in the field (Boateng, 2012; Daft, 2015).

Articles were obtained from academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Sage, Emerald, ProQuest, EBSCO, and Science Direct. These sources were considered credible and high-impact consistent with many of the past reviews of the literature on the present study constructs (Carsten et al., 2014; Mutinda & Kilika, 2019). A critical review of the information gathered was carried out, discussed, and then presented. Table 1 is a summary of the reviews from the relevant articles.

Table 1

Summary of Reviewed Journal Articles

	Aspect	Indicator	Authors	Findings	Gaps
1	Leadership Process	Influence tactics by leaders	Groves & LaRocca (2011) Pearce et al. (2014). Veliu et al. (2017) Chaturvedi et al. (2019)	- Creating strong perceptions of shared values influences follower beliefs, perspectives and willingness to engage in extra-role citizenship behaviors. - Different leadership styles and approaches are needed for positive influence subject to the characteristics of the situation and followers. - Influence tactics used by leaders have a significant positive relationship with followers' organizational commitment.	- Possible bias due to leaders identifying their direct reports to participate in the study. - Other forms of influences not considered. - Possible bias as data was provided by managers in gauging employee performance. - Inspirational appeal and rationality influence tactics were viewed as mediating variables. - In all the cases, the approach to the leadership process was leader-centric, while motivation was not considered as a contributor to the processes.
		Influence tactics by followers	Lu et al. (2019) Madigan et al. (2020)	- Employees use upward influence tactics for their innovative ideas to be positively assessed and implemented. - Rational persuasion and inspirational appeal tactics are positively correlated with influence effectiveness.	- Influence was used as a moderating and not independent variable - The actual implementation of the projects was not verified. - Focus was on tactics that were effective when influencing organizational decision-makers upwards.

		Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations	<p>Putra et al. (2017)</p> <p>Kuvaas et al. (2017)</p> <p>Kalhoroz et al. (2017)</p> <p>Fischer et al. (2019)</p>	<p>- Employees' work engagement is significantly improved by intrinsic motivation. Employees' intrinsic motivation is not diminished by introducing extrinsic motivation</p> <p>- Intrinsic motivation is associated with positive outcomes and is negatively correlated with negative outcomes.</p> <p>- Extrinsic motivation is negatively related to positive outcomes.</p> <p>- Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation moderately correlate negatively.</p> <p>- The higher the perceived probability of receiving relational rewards, and the higher the intrinsic motivation, the greater the positive effect on performance.</p> <p>- The relationship between intrinsic motivation and performance is not moderated by transactional rewards.</p>	<p>- Bias from self-reported data collected at a point in time.</p> <p>- Small sample size from a relatively homogenous source is not fully representative.</p> <p>- Generalizability of results was limited by the cross-sectional study designs.</p> <p>- Data on supervisor-rated performance for employees was not fully obtained.</p> <p>- The non-probability convenient sampling technique used by Kalhoroz et al. implied that findings could not be generalized.</p> <p>- Data reliability may have been compromised by the use of self-measurements for all variables.</p>
2	Followership	<p>Follower Roles</p> <p>Leader-follower relationships</p> <p>Follower Influence</p>	<p>Scandura & Graen as cited in Hurwitz & Hurwitz (2015)</p> <p>Bastardo & Van Vugt (2019)</p> <p>Saqib & Arif (2017)</p> <p>Carsten et al. (2010)</p> <p>Bourgoin et al. (2020)</p>	<p>- Followership is either proactive, active, or passive: active followers give input in decisions; passive followers seek obedience and deference; while active and proactive followers challenge leaders and voice their concerns or ideas. This has great benefits for group life.</p> <p>- The relationship between toxic leadership behaviors and organizational performance is mediated by employee silence.</p> <p>- Toxic leadership behaviors significantly impact negatively on organizational performance.</p> <p>- Employees in the managers' out-groups can improve in performance by developing strong one-on-one relationships with the managers</p> <p>- The performance of authority involves not just people, but a wider range of actants including tools, and principles.</p> <p>- Authority is found in the practical enactment of relationships among individuals, and between those individuals and elements of their environment.</p>	<p>- Study did not explain how proactive or passive followers would deal with organizational constraints.</p> <p>- The strength of the interaction between followership schema and leadership or organizational context could not be drawn.</p> <p>- Single source bias due to data collection at a single time and from a single segment.</p> <p>- Managers in large organizations may not practically be able to spend time with all employees to develop strong relationships.</p> <p>- The implications of a performative perspective on the power dynamics in the non-hierarchical work settings were not considered.</p> <p>- The study employed qualitative approaches only.</p>

3	Organizational Contexts	Internal Context	<p>Klein et al. (2013)</p> <p>Gochhayat et al. (2017)</p> <p>Shin & Konrad (2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing culture is positively related to organizational effectiveness. - Cultural norms are positively related to leadership styles. - A strong organizational culture indirectly predicts effectiveness. - High-performance work systems (HPWS) positively contribute to organizational productivity and vice versa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants were pre-screened by their employers, which reduced variability, hence limiting generalizability. - In addition to leadership, other factors that influence culture should have been considered and controlled. - The culture of trust was the independent variable. - Culture advances over a period of time, but the study only assessed its strength at one point in time. - The study did not consider the role of contingent factors, including business environment and human resource expertise among decision-makers, in understanding the impact of HPWS on performance and vice versa.
4	Organizational Performance	Determinants of organizational performance	<p>Rehman et al. (2019)</p> <p>Pang & Lu (2018)</p> <p>Luxmore et al. (2012)</p> <p>Burak et al. (2017)</p> <p>Mutinda & Kilika (2019)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational capabilities positively and significantly influence organizational performance. - Organizational capabilities significantly mediate the relationship between management control systems and organizational performance. - Motivation dimensions of job performance and remuneration positively influence financial performance dimensions - Job autonomy and job environment positively impact the non-financial performance dimensions. - Motivated and dedicated workers are needed to maintain a competitive advantage for best organizational performance. - Organizations can maximize financial benefits for sustainability by investing in CSR, especially in the firm's introductory stage or whenever instability is low. - The deployment of the top management team's cognitive capabilities enhances organizational performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management control systems were used as a package in determining organizational performance. - Organizational capabilities were mediating factors. - Other determinants of organizational performance needed consideration. - Data was not obtained from followers. - No empirical data.

Conceptualization of Key Constructs

Leadership Process

Daft (2015) explains a conceptualization of leadership based on four eras of leadership thinking. It began with great man theories and personal leadership traits era, the bureaucracy and hierarchy era, the change and team leader era, and lastly, the high-performance era of culture, change, adaptation, and shared vision. Recent theorists have viewed leadership as a broader

process of mutual influence diffused among the members of a social system (Liden et al., 2008). This conceptualization promotes collaborative work and collective responsibility (Rodrigues, 2019). Organizational outcomes are thus viewed as the direct result of the influences individuals exert amongst parties in their contexts.

Influence constitutes the core representing the fundamental mechanism for the operation of the leadership process (Stoner & Freeman, 2009, as cited in Stojanovic-Aleksic & Krstic, 2016). Influence is “any action or behavior that leads to changes in attitudes or behavior of another person or group” (Stojanovic-Aleksic & Krstic, 2016, p. 19). As a source of authority, it relates to the leader’s positive engagement with followers, which influences their behavior and perceptions (Baker et al., 2014; Bourgoin et al., 2020; Holloway, 2012). Three major influences have been identified (Kelman, 1958, as cited in Yukl, 2013; Laurin & Joussemet, 2017). They include instrumental compliance when the targeted person performs a requested action to get a tangible reward or avoid some form of punishment; internalization influence used to enact desirable behaviors or to suppress impermissible ones; and personal identification influence used when the target individual imitates the agent’s behavior or attitudes to please the agent.

Studies reveal that leaders employ different influence tactics, including rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, consultation, or collaboration, depending on the characteristics of the situation (Groves & LaRocca, 2011; Velu et al., 2017; Yukl, 2013). For instance, Chaturvedi et al. (2019) established that inspirational appeal and rational persuasion influences “partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and affective organizational commitment” (p. 1462). Further, Madigan et al. (2020) affirmed that inspirational appeals and rational persuasion were positively correlated with influence effectiveness. Lu et al. (2019) found that “employees’ upward influence tactics had an interactive effect on the extent to which their innovative ideas were positively assessed by their seniors and, in turn, implemented” (p. 579). The findings underscored that employees could use influence tactics to shape organizational outcomes, just like leaders.

Motivation, as Nguyen (2020) has argued, plays a prominent role as a strategy for improving performance. It accounts “for an individual’s intensity, direction, and persistence of effort toward attainingorganizational goals” (Robbins & Judge, 2017, p. 247). Intrinsic motivation explains “the spontaneous tendencies by individuals to be interested and inquisitive, to look for challenges and to apply and enhance their knowledge and skills, even in the absence of rewards” (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017, p. 1). Studies support that high intrinsic motivation positively affects organizational outcomes, including improved work engagement (Fischer et al., 2019; Gong & Zhang, 2017; Ivancevich et al., 2014; Putra et al., 2017). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation concerns the tangible material or social rewards behind individuals participating “in an action as a means to an end rather than an end in itself” (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, as cited in Makki & Abid, 2017, p. 39). Studies have found intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation to moderately correlate negatively with some organizational outcomes, including work performance (Kuvaas et al., 2017). Others have revealed that both forms of motivation are positively and significantly associated with employee commitment and performance (Kalhor et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2017). In sum, well-motivated individuals discretionary engage in positive organizational behaviors, while frustration-induced behaviors emerge wherever motivation is impeded (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Kanfer, 1990; Mullins, 2010).

Followership

The roles of leaders and followers are closely interlinked. Although the leader is traditionally tasked with the wider burden of initiating and maintaining the leader-follower relationships, it is however acknowledged that both parties equally bear the responsibility (Northouse, 2019). Followership, thus, does not imply a deficient characteristic in individuals but a different kind of role in leadership. Carsten et al. (2014) described followership as the behaviors an individual engages in while interacting with others to realize common goals. How an individual chooses to enact a follower role through relationships, influences, and responsibilities depends on factors such as personal characteristics, beliefs, and organizational structure (Bullington, 2016; Carsten et al., 2010).

Followers are categorized as either passive and deferent, defiant and resisting authority, or engaged and proactive (Carsten et al., 2014; Chaleff, 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Passive and deferent followers are passive recipients of the leader's influence and remain silent and unquestioning on directives; defiant and resisting followers avoid domination and resist control or subordination; while proactive followers take initiatives, think independently, and challenge leaders. Followers have also been categorized in terms of their degree of organizational commitment and task competence. Hersey and Blanchard (1969, as cited in Jamshed & Majeed, 2018; Thompson & Glasø, 2018) identified mature followers who have mastered the skills required to achieve specific tasks or goals and have attained the highest level of development. Mature followers do not remain silent and view change as an opportunity to model desirable behaviors (Baker et al., 2014; Saqib & Arif, 2017; Sy & McCoy, 2014). Just like leaders, followers can therefore be passionate in pursuing common goals and influence the actions of leaders and the organization for higher performance.

Organizational Contexts

According to Weick (1993, as cited in Carsten et al., 2010), the social construction of the definitions of the role of the leader and that of the follower and how individuals enact those roles are influenced by their contexts. Since contexts impact many organizational aspects, managers must develop the capacity to respond to related pressures and expectations in acceptable ways (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998; Schein, 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that the relationship between improved context management and financial performance is positive (Mainardes et al., 2011).

The internal environment constitutes an organization's characteristics such as size, age, structure, and culture (Daft, 2016). The ability to reconfigure, build, and integrate the internal competencies and flexibilities to address changing external realities is critical. It represents an opportunity firm can exploit to gain a competitive advantage (Carsten et al., 2010; Wren & Bedeian, 2009). Differentiation and integration are two dimensions that broadly define the management of organization's internal environment (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, as cited in Robbins, 1990). Differentiation reflects the measures employed to deal with complexities and rapid changes, while integration measures collaboration among interdependent units for the unity of effort. For instance, empowerment, training, and contingent rewards are integrative efforts that contribute to improved productivity, while strong organizational culture indirectly predicts effectiveness through organizational communication (Gochhayat et al., 2017; Shin & Konrad, 2017). A study by Lawrence and Lorsch (1969, as cited in Daft, 2010) established that

departments differentiate themselves in structure and orientation “to deal with specialized parts of the external environment” (p. 152).

External environment consists of elements outside the organization’s boundary, which directly or indirectly impact its operations (Daft, 2016). Parties include HR, raw materials, industry, financial resources, technology, economic conditions, market, government, sociocultural, and international sectors. An organization’s ability to influence perceptions of these stakeholders in its favor is critical for growth and long-term survival (Schein, 2010). Studies affirm that employees’ perception of the values the organization demonstrates for its stakeholders affects the employee’s commitment and the organization’s performance (Awan et al., 2017; Ortega-Parra & Sastre-Castillo, 2013). Martin-Rojas et al. (2019) also identified positive relationships between the acquisition, integration, and support of technology and related skills and organizational performance.

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance (OP) has been conceptualized in various ways, but it is generally considered that both employee and organizational outcomes are its overarching goals (Asgari et al., 2020; Burak et al., 2017; Madanchian et al., 2017). Performance not only measures how well goals and objectives are achieved but also denotes “the total sum of all processes and actions undertaken by managers in the present...directed toward achieving particular set of goals in the future...satisfying the needs of stakeholders” (Mutinda & Kilika, 2019, p. 36). Employee outcomes include job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior (Ivancevich et al., 2014; Yukl, 2013). On the other hand, efficiency, satisfaction, quality, social and environmental adaptiveness, control, productivity, profitability, and development are indicators of OP (Karim et al., 2017; Paliszkiewicz et al., 2015; Pang & Lu, 2018).

The control over the external environment and the ability to attract resources and customers is particularly important to an organization’s survival (Robbins, 1990). Further, the ability to innovate new products and processes enhances organization’s ability to adapt, change, and improve its functions (Davila et al., 2006; Jones, 2013). A study by Rehman et al. (2019) suggested that organizational capabilities significantly mediated the relationship between control systems and organizational performance and its determinants.

The Import of the Leadership Process

The interactions of the various components that constitute the leadership process need optimal integration for the best outcomes. From the Resource-Based View (RBV), which attributes the superior performance to organizational capabilities and resources (Bharadwaj, 2000), the effect of the leadership process can be felt at the level of the organizational system hosting the process as well as the context in which it is exercised. The system is likely to give outcomes leading to sustained competitiveness along the path: Strategic asset---->Capability----> Competences---->Sustained competitive advantage----> Sustained performance. From this view, when influence and motivation strategies are effectively deployed with the right followership, this represents the intangible, personnel-based organizational strategic assets. Specifically, the level of leader-follower relationships and the roles, responsibilities, and initiatives enacted by both parties are key assets. On the other hand, the internal context serves to facilitate the configuration of the strategic assets to accord them VRION (value, rarity, imitability, organizational, and non-

substitutional) attributes, while the external context serves as a contingent factor either constraining or facilitating the deployment of the strategic assets on the path towards a competitive advantage for sustained performance.

Review of Related Theories

The foregoing conceptual review has established the nature and interactions of the main constructs of the leadership process, followership, organizational contexts, and organizational performance. Within these are issues that call for review of theories explaining the relationships among the constructs. The leader-member exchange theory, path-goal leadership theory, adaptive leadership theory, resource-based view theory, and situational leadership theory are considered critical pillars to the current study, and each is explained herewith to establish its relevance.

Leader–Member Exchange Theory (LMX)

The LMX theory originally described in the works of Graen and Cashman (1975); Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975); and Graen (1976) has both described and prescribed the leadership process (Northouse, 2019). Descriptively, it recognizes the existence of out-groups and in-groups. In-group members get more time and support from leaders, while out-group members only receive fair treatment based on the formal work contract. Prescriptively, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) advanced that leaders establish trust and respect with their followers to create special relationships with the entire workforce as an in-group. The central idea is the two-way mutual relationship leaders create with individual followers in all cases. Studies have shown that high-quality LMX relationships are responsible for positive organizational outcomes (Daft, 2015). Therefore, the theory explains that leaders are capable of establishing and maintaining strong relationships with all their followers for mutual benefits. It also supports the claims that motivation affects follower behavior and organizational performance (Yukl, 2013).

Path-Goal Leadership Theory

Associated with Evans (1970), House (1971), and, House and Mitchell (1975), the path–goal theory explains how leaders motivate followers to accomplish goals (Northouse, 2019). Leaders enhance the satisfaction and performance of followers by increasing their expectations for success. They help followers along the path to their goals by choosing appropriate behaviors that match the needs of the followers and the tasks performed (Daft, 2015). The theory postulates that followers with strong needs for affiliation or who lack confidence prefer friendly supportive leadership; those who work in uncertain situations require directive leadership; those with an internal locus of control need participative leadership; while those with an external locus of control need an achievement-oriented leadership. The theory thus helps in explaining how influence and motivation processes and follower characteristics are necessary for the leadership process. It also clarifies why the leadership process and contextual factors need an alignment for enhanced performance.

Adaptive Leadership Theory

The theory originally formulated by Heifetz (1994, as cited in Northouse, 2019) underscores that leadership is not a trait or characteristic of the designated leader but a complex interactional

event that occurs between leaders and followers in different situations. Major components of the theory are situational challenges, leader behaviors, and adaptive work. Leaders confront technical, technical and adaptive, and adaptive situational challenges by adopting the behaviors of getting on the balcony, identifying adaptive challenges, regulating distress, maintaining disciplined attention, giving the work back to people, and protecting leadership voices from below. Overall, the theory emphasizes the leader getting concerned with helping others address challenges through a series of practical approaches. It thus helps in deducing the elements of the leadership process in terms of leader and follower influence behaviors, skills, task characteristics, contextual challenges, and how they all relate to organizational performance.

Situational Leadership Theory

Situational leadership theory (SLT) associated with Hersey and Blanchard was developed in 1969 based on the Reddin's (1967) 3-D management style theory. SLT postulates that one thing depends on other things, and for an organization to achieve effectiveness, "there must be a 'goodness of fit' between its structure and the conditions in the external environment" (Daft, 2016, p. 26). This implies that the type of leadership is significantly dependent upon contextual factors. Specifically, it explains the relationship between an effective leadership style and the readiness or maturity level of individuals, where maturity refers to "the willingness and ability of an individual to take responsibility for directing the behavior" (Vidal et al., 2017, p. 2). Individuals are thus categorized into various combinations of low and high levels of their willingness and ability, based on which leaders deploy directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating styles. From the review of the theory, follower characteristics, leadership influence behaviors, situational factors, and the manner in which all these elements interact within the leadership process are deduced.

The Resource-Based View Theory

Proponents of the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory include Penrose (1959), Wernerfelt (1984), and Barney (1991). The theory postulates that if an organization exploits its unique resources and continually maintains them, it is hard for any other organization to copy them, then these will be the strengths of the organization (Adnan et al., 2018). It implies that organizations should focus more on the internal resources than the external factors in order to endure a competitive advantage over others. Accordingly, for a resource to provide a competitive advantage, it has to fulfill the 'VRION' criteria (Miles, 2012). Overall, the theory stresses the importance of creating organizations "that are more intelligent and flexible than their competitors....by employing and developing talented staff and expanding skills base" (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014, p. 21). RBV thus helps identify how influence and motivation and followership and situational contexts can be utilized as strategic resources to produce capabilities for sustained organizational performance.

The Case for a New Theoretical Model

From the reviews, issues supporting a case for a new model linking leadership process, followership, organizational contexts, and organizational performance emerged. To begin with, there is a need to expand the scope of indicators of the leadership phenomenon in order to operationalize it beyond what extant literature has identified. Drawing from the leader-centric

perspective, most studies have operationalized the leadership process from a narrow sense that ignores the critical roles played by situational factors. Specifically, even though scholars have conceptualized leadership as “the process of influencing others... for the realization of group goals” (Platow et al., 2015, p. 20), extant literature continues to describe the process with a focus on the individual leader (Aleksic, 2016). This disregards the critical roles of followers in goals attainment. In addition, some studies have modeled influence and motivation as moderating instead of independent variables in leadership and organizational studies. A new model will thus provide an integrated perspective with a clear link between the variables.

Another issue concerns the conceptualization of the leadership process being limited in integrating the management of organizational contexts. Yukl (2002, as cited in Zahoor & Khan, 2018) conceptualized leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree...and ...facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 115). Efforts facilitation occurs within contexts that must fully be incorporated into leadership conceptualization. This calls for a revisit of theory to provide a more integrated framework to guide continuing research. Still, emerging economic pressures require that innovation is encouraged, solutions are found, and participation is maximized in organizations, yet at the same time, the same pressures mean tighter timelines in the short term, calling for efficient decision making, which in turn implies less participation (Van Wart, 2013). This inconsistency represents a knowledge gap calling for new management thinking.

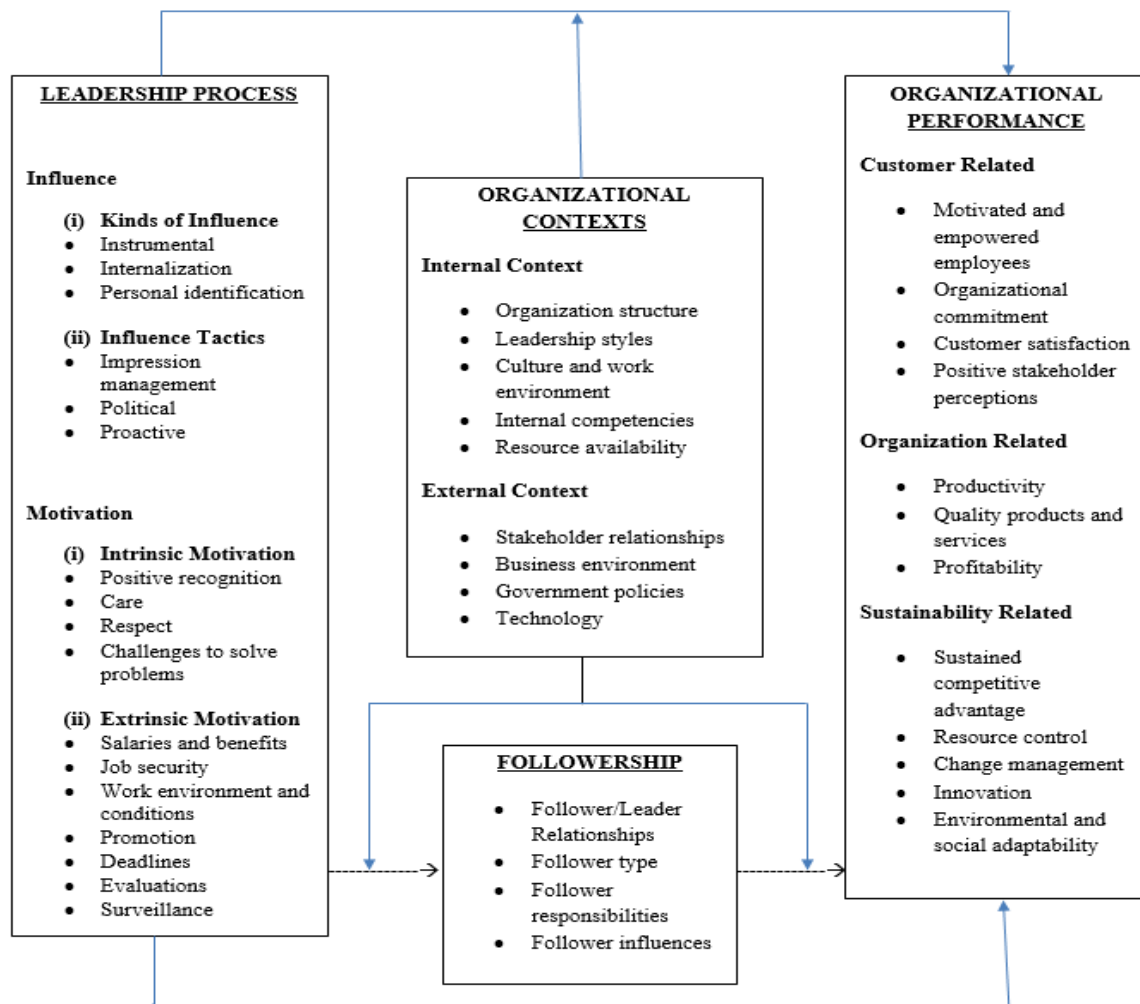
Empirical studies have also produced conflicting results on the relationships of the study variables. For instance, the effect of applying both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on organizational outcomes is inconclusive (Kalhor et al., 2017; Kuvaas et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2017). This could be attributed to methodological limitations highlighting the need of followers and other stakeholders to constitute a significant portion of study samples. Furthermore, most empirical studies have used quantitative approaches when mixed methods would likely produce more consistent results (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Finally, leaders play key roles in promoting diversity for a wider representation of stakeholders (Fernandez et al., 2010, as cited Van Wart, 2013). However, Baggio and Cooper (2010, as cited in Mainardes et al., 2011) maintained that stakeholders' needs are often dynamic, difficult to discern, or even mutually incompatible, which complicates decision-making. Therefore, there is a need to provide knowledge and a meaningful basis upon which organizations can demarcate boundaries defining who their key stakeholders are to guide sound decision-making.

The Proposed Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework entails a “model of how one theorizes or makes logical sense of the relationships among the several factors identified as important to the problem” (Sekaran, 2003, p. 87). In line with the gaps identified from the review, the study proposes a new conceptual model explaining the relationships between the study variables, as summarized in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



The new model theorizes the effective deployment of followership in the leadership process for optimal performance as follows:

First, most studies have conceptualized leadership from a leader-centric perspective and over-relied on data from leaders. They have also modeled influence and motivation as moderating or mediating variables. This is one-sided and a limited view of the leadership process. Therefore, the new model proposes an expanded conceptualization to include both influence and motivation as critical indicators of the leadership process with direct and indirect influence on organizational performance (Bullington, 2016; Vidal et al., 2017).

Second, followership as an emergent phenomenon is an immediate outcome of the interactions within the leadership process and other factors for better performance (Carsten et al., 2014). Extant literature has identified follower relationships, type, responsibilities, and influence as major indicators of followership. However, many studies on the roles of followership have been inconclusive and have not viewed followership as an organizational outcome or a strategic resource. The proposed model conceptualizes followership as a variable mediating the relationship between the leadership process and organizational performance.

Finally, the model conceptualizes organizational contexts as fully integrated into the leadership process because of the strong moderating effect on the relationships between

leadership, followership, and organizational performance. Lumpkin and Dess (2001, as cited in Luxmore et al., 2012) affirmed that contextual changes imply uncertainty and risk to organizations, yet many scholars continue to examine contexts as an independent and not a moderating variable in studies on organizational performance.

Study Propositions

In line with the framework proposed in Figure 1, the following propositions are derived:

Leadership Process and Organizational Performance

The kinds and tactics of influence employed by leaders and the strategies they use in motivating others affect the attainment of goals. These interactions are key strategic assets for sustained performance. Previous studies have shown a relationship between components of the leadership process and organizational performance (Kanfer, 1990; Kinicki & Fugate, 2018; Kuvaas et al., 2017), and this study proposes that:

Proposition 1: Execution of the leadership process will positively affect the overall organizational performance.

The Role of Followership

Based on RBV, effective followership is an organizational capability constituting key competencies for sustained performance. Followership is thus a unique characteristic an organization can acquire for competitive advantage (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Arising from previous research findings demonstrating a positive relationship between followership, leadership, and organizational performance (Bourgoin et al., 2020; Carsten et al., 2010; Yukl, 2013), this study proposes that:

Proposition 2: There is a correlation between the leadership process deployed in an organization and followership.

Proposition 3: Even though the leadership process affects organizational performance, the degree of the effect depends upon the characteristics of the followers in the organization.

The Role of Contextual Factors

Effective leadership ensures the organization creates capabilities to adapt and respond to changing internal and external environments (Daft, 2016). In line with findings of past studies that have shown a relationship between organizational contexts, leadership process, and organizational performance (Awan et al., 2017; Gochhayat et al., 2017; Klein et al., 2013; Martin-Rojas et al., 2019; Ortega-Parra & Sastre-Castillo, 2013), the study proposes that:

Proposition 4: Organizational contexts moderate the relationship between the leadership process and organizational performance.

Proposition 5: The mediating effect of followership on the relationship between leadership process and organizational performance is moderated by organizational contexts.

Proposition 6: The relationship between the leadership process deployed and the resultant followership is moderated by organizational contexts.

Conclusion

This study reviewed extant conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature to provide an understanding of followership in the leadership process and organizational performance. A conceptual framework was proposed to model the relationships among the constructs identified in the emergent phenomenon. Influence and motivation were identified as the key components of the leadership process with resultant followership that provides strategic value for sustained organizational performance. The role of organizational contexts in governing the relationship between leadership process and organizational performance was underscored. It was argued that the pursuit of the realization of organizational goals should incorporate the needs of identified stakeholders. The conceptual understanding of each construct was clarified by identifying respective indicators and then anchoring them on relevant theoretical frameworks.

The literature studied was vast but only drew from limited disciplines considered relevant to enhance the understanding of the study constructs. The propositions made were yet to be empirically validated. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate the elements constituting followership, a phenomenon that has received little attention in leadership studies (Yang et al., 2020). The study calls on future research to consider using the proposed conceptual framework with the given set of indicators to validate the propositions with factual data.

Declarations

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