

## Does Courageous Followership contribute to Exemplary Leadership Practices: Evidence from Pakistan?

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### Abstract

*Researchers, theorists and social scientist's considerate approach towards predicting behavior pattern of a leader/follower still remains an ever challenging topic. Building literature on followership and leadership, adopting reversing the lens approach in leadership research this study hypothesized that the courageous followership helps in development of exemplary leadership practices. This is the first empirical study in Pakistan, to test the theory of courageous followership behavioral dimensions of managers' in Pakistani organizations. The sample of the study were managers (n =649) from public and private sector, chosen through non-probability (purposive) sampling. Multiple regression technique was applied to test the hypotheses. The present study concluded that courageous followership plays a constructive role in leadership development. The findings of the study are inspiring managers, to understand and develop the culture where courageous followership can flourish resulting in exemplary leadership. Thus directly contributing to organizational' success and growth.*

**Keywords:** Courageous followership, assume responsibility, serve, and take part in transformation, challenge, exemplary leadership practices

### Introduction

Building better organizations requires a balance of strengthening leadership and followership skills as good followership skills leads to effective leadership development (Hurtwiz & Hurtwiz, 2015). Organization fails partly due to leadership ineptitude and partly due to irresponsible followers (Stehlik, 2014). In conjunction with leadership role, a culture of courageous followership behavior is imperative that will help the organizations to advance in global world (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). Chaleff (1995) defined courageous followers who assume responsibility themselves and helps the leaders in organizational growth. Such behavior of responsibility develops capabilities of followers to be self-accountable towards their profession. The core of effective leadership process depends upon effective capabilities of leader and follower.

Today's competitive global environment demands the role of followers as co-producer of leadership; followers should take responsibility and ownership of organization. On the contrary, researchers have criticized that overly leadership focus has led to the ignorance towards followership role in the organization (Martin,

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2015). Theoretical research study by Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe and Carsten (2014) calls for reversing the lens approach by thinking leadership behavior as a recipient of followership behavior. This approach calls for research to twist the old question on leadership, when leadership styles are studied as followership outcomes. The focus of this approach is how followership behavior identifies leadership behavior and its outcomes because from followership lens, it is the followership behavior that develops leadership capacity (Collinson, 2006).

In order to construct institutions/organizations successfully, there is need to understand both roles simultaneously (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015). Learning courageous followership behavior helps the individuals in engaging exemplary behavior, to see their role as accountable and responsible part of organization (Schwab, 2017). On the contrary, learning good followership behavior is considered as oxymoron, every individual wants to become a good leader not a good follower. Organizations spend millions of rupees in training the managers for acquiring good leadership skills. The Pakistan Institute of Management (PIM) pioneers in executive professional development has trained more than 150,000 manager since 1954, focusing on development of leadership skills, yet good followership skills development is missing. Although leadership is important aspect in organization success, but 80 % of success is direct result of follower's contribution. (Kelley, 1992). In veracity following and leading together makes true leadership. Therefore, in today's dynamic environment we need to comprehend the role of followers and good followership in leadership skill development.

Based on gap identified in the literature, present study formulated to encompass both aspects of courageous followership and exemplary leadership to identify that if a manager in subordinate role is a courageous followers, will likely to exhibit exemplary leadership. Therefore this study is conducted to apprehend the need of research as it is important to investigate, where leaders come from, how they develop, and how they can be developed (Dionne et al., 2014). Courageous followership research is in its infancy, only few empirical studies were found (Dixon, Mercado & Knowles 2013). There is also deficiency of empirical investigation in the field of followership in Pakistani context (Shahzadi et al., 2017). Hence, managers could use study findings to develop training programs to mature the courageous followership behavior which in turn will help in leadership skill development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Courageous Followership and Exemplary Leadership Practices**

Chalief (1995) defined courageous follower as an individual who possess five characteristics in subordination role. These characteristics are reflected as behavior

dimensions of courageous follower. These dimensions are (a) assuming responsibility, (b) serve, (c) challenge, (d) take part in transformation and (e) take moral action. Whereas exemplary leadership practices are sub-characterized as ‘model the way’, ‘inspire a shared vision’, ‘challenge the process’, ‘enable others to act’ and ‘encourage the heart’ identified by Kouzes and Posner (2017) after 30 years of research in business organizations. The heart of leadership approach emphasizes that there is need to develop certain skills and behavior in followers which leads them to self-leadership (Agho, 2009). Hence, it is important to understand; what type of follower will become an exemplary leader.

Courageous followership helps in building followers to see their role as partner of leader which makes them effective in the organization. Effective followers demonstrate exemplary leadership behavior, which can facilitate their adoption of leader like role (Baker, Mathis, & Stitis-Doe, 2011) moreover it is imperative to bring followership role in leadership development equation (Dionne *et al.*, 2014). A keen call for leadership research is to provide fuller picture because leadership do not exists without good followership (Tsakeni & Jita, 2017). We must understand the philosophy of leadership by Aristotle “First learn to follow then, lead”. The following part of literature review links five dimensions of courageous followership (independent variable) with exemplary leadership practices (dependent variable) as a whole.

### **Assume responsibility and exemplary leadership practices**

The dimension of courageous followership assuming responsibility helps to develop a courageous follower who discover and create opportunities to maximize the organizational goals (Chaleff, 1995). Courageous followers understand their own values and work with dignity, dedication (Schwab, 2017) show loyalty to organization to become effective follower. Effective followers are engaged in continuous improvement of themselves and their organizations( Baker et al., 2011) Such behavior will lead to exemplary leadership as exemplary leadership practices develop individuals to set an example by aligning actions with values and work with responsibility in organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Therefore a courageous follower by understanding their own values, take ownership of organization that will have likely increased ability to espouse exemplary leadership practices.

*H1a: Courageous followership dimension to assume responsibility has a significant positive impact on exemplary leadership practices*

### **Serve and exemplary leadership practices**

Another dimension of courageous followership is Serve, it helps to develop a quality of courage to serve, assume additional responsibilities to serve organization (Chaleff, 1995).Courageous followers look for connections to goals rather than criticize

the leader's approach (Hopper, 2008) and follow the vision of organization. A courageous follower high on serve dimension can easily practice exemplary leadership behavior due to the fact that follower goes extra miles to complete his responsibilities and to strive for organizational success. It helps in development of passion for a purpose and moving people towards common purpose for organization success (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Therefore, courageous followership dimension of serve can likely increase the ability of follower, to be exemplary in leadership role.

*H1b: Courageous followership dimension to serve has a significant positive impact on exemplary leadership practices*

### **Challenge and Exemplary Leadership Practices**

Courageous followership dimension of challenge develops capability of follower to value organizational harmony while challenging some decision of leaders when it is not aligned with organizational success (Chaleff, 1995). Such follower takes initiative and voices their concern with commitment to accept change and serve as change agents (Carsten *et al.*, 2010). This ability to challenge will develop exemplary leadership capacity in followers and help in adopting to change in organization in which individual in leadership role do not wait for change to happen (Dionne *et al.*, 2014) rather they seek changes for themselves along with their followers (Hage & Posner, 2015).

*H1c: Courageous followership dimension to challenge has a significant positive impact on exemplary leadership practices*

### **Take part in transformation and exemplary leadership practices**

When organization needs some innovation, courageous followers are the first one to help in transformation; rather they initiate transformation (Chaleff, 1995). Courageous followers perceive the need of leader and other group members and serve as bridge in relationship with leaders in organization (Schwab, 2017). Courageous follower being an important bridge in group members and partner to leaders will likely have ability to recognize contributions of individuals showing ability to espouse exemplary leadership practices. As exemplary leadership practices develop capacity of individual to recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individuals and create a spirit of community (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

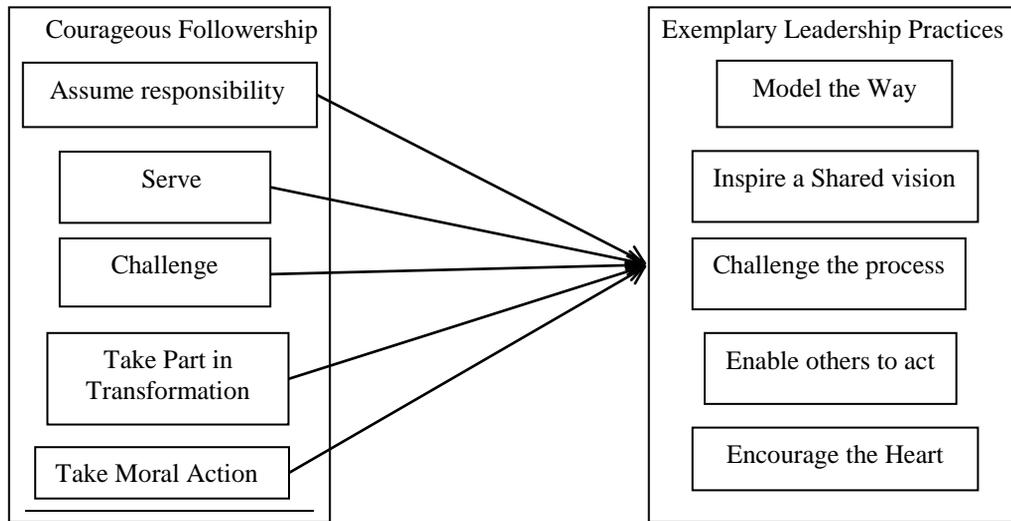
*H1d: Courageous followership dimension to participate in transformation has significant positive impact on exemplary leadership practices*

### **Take moral action and exemplary leadership practices**

Courageous followership develop ability to take moral action, to leave the organization on basis of unethical practices of leader (Chaleff, 1995). The ability of courageous follower to take moral action reflects ability to possess moral characteristics of honesty and trustworthiness along with moral values engaging in ethical reasoning

(Schwab, 2017). Courageous followers constructively challenge leaders, unlike passive followers, who blindly follow the leaders (Crasten *et al.*, 2010). This ability to take moral action is based on ethics, honesty and trustworthiness are similar abilities required to adapt and develop exemplary leadership practices. Because exemplary leadership practices develop capacity of individual to be honest, competent and trustworthy (Hage & Posner, 2015) in this way courageous follower become an exemplary leaders.

*H1e: Courageous followership dimension to take moral action has a significant positive impact on the exemplary leadership practices.*



*Fig 1: Conceptual frame work of courageous followership dimensions and exemplary leadership practices*

### **Data and Methodology**

Based on positivist research philosophy, current study is descriptive in nature. The study setting is non-contrived and cross sectional data is taken from actual work place setting through questionnaires. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire without interference of researcher.

### **Measure**

Relevant scales were adopted for measuring all variables of study. Researchers used adapted instruments; to measure courageous followership behavior of managers The Followership Profile (2003) by Gene Dixon (personal communication, 17 March 2014) is used. The reliability analysis for five dimensions of courageous followership is between .70 and .83. The reliability of assume responsibility consist of 5 items ( $\alpha = .72$ ), serve 5 items ( $\alpha = .76$ ), challenge consist of 3 items ( $\alpha = .70$ ), take part in transformation 3 items ( $\alpha = .80$ ) and take moral action 3 items ( $\alpha = .83$ ). These findings are consistent with

findings of Schwab (2017). Leadership Practice Inventory by Kouzes and Posner (2017) was used to measure five exemplary leadership practices. This research study is analyzing the five exemplary leadership practices as a whole. The reliability of Leadership Practice Inventory- Self (L P I) 30 items ( $\alpha = .89$ ) is consistent with reliability analysis of Hage and Posner (2015).

### **Population**

The target population of study was five leading sector organizations (banking, telecom, engineering, software and transport) from public and private sector. The rationale for selecting these sectors is based on fact that these sectors have seen growth by adding value to Pakistan economy. According to Pakistan Vision 2025 banking, telecom, engineering, software and transport sectors have emerged as the main drivers of economic growth, contributing 57.7% of country GDP. Therefore it will be interesting to know courageous followership and leadership behavior among these sectors. Success of any organization depends upon the performance of individuals working in the organization.

### **Sample**

Participants include managers at operational, middle and executive level from public and private sector organizations. Purposive sampling is used to get relevant sample as per rationale of study and unit of analysis. VanVoorhis and Morgan (2007) provides a comprehensive overview of the procedures used to determine regression sample sizes while suggesting sample  $N \geq 50 + 8m$  (where  $m$  is the number of IVs) can be sufficient for regression. Hence, 120 questionnaires in each banking, telecom, engineering, transport and software in public and private sector were distributed.

Total of 1200 questionnaires were equally distributed to Public and Private sectors through purposive sampling in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. However out of 1200 participants, 649 of these participants provide complete data and were included in study with response rate of 54%. Thus final sample included 41% participants from public sector and 59% from private sector respectively. The participants include 73% male and 26% females age group between 22 to 53 years and the mean age is 34. Executive manager include 41%, middle managers 25 % and operational managers 33%. The educational level results show that 67% participants are at master level and graduates are at 33%. Tenure in organization is 1 year to 26 years.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results of correlation analysis**

The magnitude of association of courageous followership dimensions of assume responsibility, serve, challenge, take part in transformation and take moral action with

exemplary leadership practices is analyzed by Pearson correlation. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: *Correlation Matrix of all of variables (N=649)*

Variables	1	11	111	1V	V	V1
1 Assume Responsibility	-					
11 Serve	.40**	-				
111 Challenge	.26**	.45**	-			
1V Participate in transformation	.27**	.39**	.35**	-		
V Take Moral Action	.35**	.21**	.38**	.27**	-	
V1 Exemplary Leadership practices	.55**	.47**	.43**	.54**	.57**	-

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0 .01 level (2- tailed)

The results in Table (1) show significant association of courageous followership dimensions of assume responsibility ( $r=.55, p< .001$ ), serve ( $r=.47, p< .001$ ), challenge ( $r=.43, p< .001$ ), participate in transformation ( $r=.54, p< .001$ ) and take moral action ( $r=.57, p< .001$ ) with exemplary leadership practices. The results illustrate strong association in line of Cohen criteria (Cohen,1988).Courageous followership dimensions of assume responsibility, serve, challenge, participate in transformation as independent variables strongly influence exemplary leadership practices as dependent variable and all variable move in straight direction.

### Results of Testing of Hypotheses

The multiple regression analysis is carried out to test the hypothesized relationships in H1a, H1b H1c H1d H1e. The courageous followership dimension of assume responsibility, serve the leader, challenge, participate in transformation, and take moral action are computed as independent variables and exemplary leadership practices as dependent variable ,enter method is used in multiple regression in SPSS. The results are presented in Table2.

Table 2: *Courageous followership dimensions and exemplary leadership practices (N=649)*

Model	B	S. E	$\beta$	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.72	.21		7.85	.000
Assume Responsibility	.40	.09	.22	4.49	.000
Serve	.17	.07	.10	2.75	.006
Challenge	.33	.05	.21	6.25	.000
Participate in transformation	.21	.08	.12	2.70	.007
Take Moral action	.24	.07	.17	3.46	.001

$r=.66, R^2=.43*** F= 99.7,df (5,643)$

\* $p< .05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

In order to verify direct impact of courageous followership (assume responsibility, serve, challenge, participate in transformation and take moral action) on exemplary

leadership practices multiple regression is computed. In table2, the value of  $r=.66$  which predicts strong relationship of independent variable with dependent variable according to Cohen's criteria (Cohen, 1988) that states value of  $r > 0.5$  indicate strong relationship. The value of  $R^2$  explains 43 % of variance in the scores for exemplary leadership practices accounted for by the courageous followership dimensions ( $F(5, 643) = 99.7, p < .01$ ). The multiple regression results support the H1a, H1b H1c H1d H1e, as significant positive contribution to exemplary leadership practice is made by assume responsibility ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ), serve ( $\beta = .10, p < .01$ ), challenge ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ), participate in transformation ( $\beta = .12, p < .01$ ) and take moral action ( $\beta = .17, p < .001$ ).

The results provide evidence that courageous followership all dimensions contribute in developing this exemplary leadership practice. The support for H1a H 1b, H 1c, H 1d and H1e reflects that courageous followership behavior has a strong impact on exemplary leadership practices and it will increase the ability of managers to become an exemplary leader. The managers as good followers will also exhibit exemplary leadership in their organizations. In this study support for these hypotheses indicates that managers of public and private sector organizations, via self-reporting survey response exhibit both qualities as a follower as well as leaders which support theoretical concepts of other researchers' studies (Dixon, 2003; Martin, 2015). These findings also confirm the concepts, that individuals leads as well as follows and true leadership is combine act of leading and following (Tsakeni&Jeti,2017). Learning good followership influence understanding of accountability and responsibility oriented behavior (Schwab, 2017) which leads to ethical development of individual.

Moreover courageous followership as a proactive behavior has positive organizational outcomes. Courageous followership is a form of proactive behavior which help in building followers to see their role with leaders as co-producers of leadership (Tolstikov-Mast, 2016). Managers adopting courageous followership behavior will make organization more effective and efficient and can be future leaders. Hence the findings of this study highlight the importance of courageous followership and perhaps give an extended view of leadership. It supports the concept that subordinates in followership position have ability to exhibit leadership. This type of upward leadership is different from top-down leadership role (Carsten *et al.*, 2010).

### **Practical Implications**

First and foremost implication of this study is for public and private sector organizations. Managers of both sectors can promote courageous followership behavior at their organizational level. It will help them to analyze the capacity of their

subordinates and hence delegate responsibility to them. The policy makers of organizations can introduce courageous followership in training programs. It will help to prevent executive derailment and will enhance high performers' career development. Great leadership and followership is a part of same system. Unfortunately, in our organizations we have passive type of followership behaviors, not to question the authority even if they are on the wrong side and this does not produce good results. In young age, we are trained to follow the norm of silence and have fear of being blamed for the problem. The development of managers for courageous followership will help them to get out of these problems and serve the organization with trust, honesty and dedication. It will not only help them to grow as a person but make them more confident at their jobs. A deeper understanding of followership and leadership may provide us knowledge to select right leaders who design more effective organization.

### **Academic Implications**

The results of this study can have an important academic implication. It will add to universal body of knowledge on leadership and followership studies. These results will help to support the academic discussion on followership; moreover it will shift the focus of researchers from leadership to followership in Pakistan. If concept of courageous followership is taught at junior level to students, then our generation will follow notion of Aristotle "First follow and then lead". More investment should be done in followers' development either at educational or at organizational. We should build a culture of courageous followership to neutralize the consequences of toxic leaders.

### **Future Research Avenues**

Future research should continue to explore followership as it will help in building more theories on followership. The use of mixed method can be a new direction for research because it will help in theory building. Future research should also explore the demographic variables of gender, education, organization level, etc., to understand more deeply the followership along with leadership. In future, research can be done, especially in educational and health care sectors in Pakistan as good followership plays critical role in these sectors (Schwab, 2017). Future studies can adopt longitudinal experimental or quasi-experimental design as it will help to establish definitive conclusions. Future research can also explore instrument development of followership as very few valid instruments are available (Dixon, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

Every kind of leadership depends on having an abundant corresponding kind of followership. Both kinds of leading and following positions are important and high performing organizations understand and practice both kinds. Management behavior and

organizational structures can hardly evolve, if their basic subordination component is left in the shadow of leadership (Martin, 2015). The point of focus is whether follower is in positional or personal form of followership he/she should adopt courageous followership. Courageous followers do not follow blindly rather they influence, contribute and adhere to moral values which help in development of exemplary leadership which make individuals honest, competent and forward-looking future leaders. In spirit to develop future leaders, existing leaders should be trained to take notice, utilize, recognize and reward employee's proactive behavior (Shahzadi et al., 2017). Today Pakistan not only needs exemplary leaders but also courageous followers to take up the responsibility and self-accountability for the success and growth of their organizations in particular and economy in general.

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