FRI-2B.412-1-EM1-04

FOLLOWERSHIP BEHAVIOR AND STYLE:
AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE[4]

Assoc. Prof. Emil Kotsev, PhD
Department of Business Development and Innovation,
Faculty of Business and Management
University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev"
Tel.: +359 888 838250
E-mail: ekotsev@uni-ruse.bg

Aneta Irmanova, PhD Student
Department of Business Development and Innovation,
Faculty of Business and Management
University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev"
Phone: +359 888 202347
E-mail: a.irmanova@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper deals with followers' behavior and style in the organization. Followership behavior is defined as a set of preliminary attitudes, decisions and corresponding actions generated in the process of "inferior - superior" interaction. An attempt has been made to analyze some invisible aspects of followership behavior in the organization, such as temperament, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, value system, and causal attributions. On the basis of this analysis, a parallel is drawn with the individual's orientation towards authority, assuming that the employee's orientation towards the immediate supervisor is the basis of his/her followership style. It is concluded that the followership style of each employee represents a relatively stable system of methods, techniques and methods based on experience and beliefs, which characterizes the features of his/her practical activity as a subordinate. On this basis, specific recommendations are formulated for subordinate employees in the organization.

Keywords: Followership, Subordinate, Followership Behavior, Orientation towards Authority, Followership Style

JEL Codes: L20, L22

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the behavior of the individual has been the subject of constant discussion and some controversy by specialists. According to behaviorists, every gesture, every thought, every volitional manifestation is only a reflex (reaction) to certain stimuli (Anggriani, 2023). Humanistic and hermeneutic psychologists do not accept behaviorists' dependence on animal research and direct attention to the layers of value and meaning of human personality, where, according to them, are the main reasons for our behavior (Rennie, 2007). Cognitivists believe that behavior is a consequence of a person's expectations and ideas (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Interactionists disagree, stating that at the basis of individual behavior are attitudes, intentions and actions oriented towards reaching a certain goal in interaction with other individuals (Schneider, 1982).

Without arguing with the various scientific views, in general the followership behavior in the organization can be defined as a set of preliminary attitudes, decisions and corresponding actions of a subordinate, generated in the process of "inferior-superior" interaction.

With the definition formulated in this way, the following question arises: should a distinction be made between "followership behavior" and "followership style"? The purpose of this paper is to

---

offer a reasoned answer to this question by analyzing the two concepts separately and looking for both commonalities and differences between them.

METHOD

The research philosophy of this study is interpretivism as it focuses on the richness of the insights gathered rather on the provision of precise definitions applicable to all situations regardless of some key factors and variables (Myers, 2019; Saunders et al., 2019; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The research is based upon a relativist ontology: reality is perceived through intersubjectivity through consideration of meanings and organizational aspects of the concepts studied (Saunders et al., 2019).

The study applies qualitative research design to explore a complex phenomenon such as followership. Data is obtained through a combination of two research strategies. Since the study aims to investigate categories that are not clearly defined, exploratory research is involved. It also aims to accurately describe followership behavior and followership style, which implies a descriptive research strategy.

Data collection involved retrieving information on followership from scientific journals, reports, and books.

EMPLOYEES' FOLLOWERSHIP BEHAVIOR

There is a visible and an invisible part of employees' followership behavior (Hristova & Hristov, 1998). The visible part includes the obvious aspects of behavior: productivity, quality of work, absenteeism, communications, and suitability. Job satisfaction and motivation are neutral because they are often only half-obvious. In general, the visible aspects of employee's followership behavior are its responses to the conditions and stimuli of the environment. The invisible part is composed of the hidden aspects of behavior: temperament, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, value system, and causal attributions. These can explain employee's reactions to each individual stimulus, which determines their significance.

Temperament can be defined as interindividual differences in behavior that are stable over time and in different contexts (Travnik et al., 2020). Since these differences are entirely innate, they hardly change over the course of an individual's life. Among the psycho-behavioral differences between employees can be indicated their physical and mental capacity for work, their emotional excitability and lability, their preferences for routine work or new challenges, etc.

Another hidden dominant ingredient of behavior is *perceptions*. They reflect the way people perceive the world around them. For the same situation or object, different employees may have different perceptions. For example, for some of them, working in the company represents an opportunity for self-determination and self-improvement, while for others it is a means of livelihood, and still for others – a proof that they exist or a way to expend energy. In addition to environmental conditions, the reasons for the appearance of one or another perceptual result lie in the past experience, expectations, needs, motives and goals of the individual. Some authors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970) devote a special place to expectations as a determining factor. If their conclusions are followed, what subordinates expect from their supervisor strongly influences how they perceive him/her and, consequently, their behavior in the organization.

An individual's *beliefs* and *convictions* are another dominant component that in some cases determines behavior. Together with expectations, they form the basis of the concept of so-called "self-fulfilling prophecies", also known as the Pygmalion Effect. According to it, an individuals' beliefs, convictions and expectations not only influence their decisions and actions, but also contribute to the consolidation and realization of the same beliefs, convictions and expectations. For example, if a subordinate is convinced that the manager would react to a situation in a certain way, subordinate's behavior could provoke the appearance of the expected manager's reaction.

Beliefs arise from an individual's knowledge of the world and focus on reality - as the individual sees and understands it. Close in meaning to them are values and attitudes. A value represents an ideal to which a person strives. An attitude is a specific internal mood affecting an individual's thoughts and feelings toward a particular object or idea. According to Gross (1987), to

convert a belief into an attitude, a "value" ingredient is needed which, by definition, is to do with an individual's sense of what is desirable, good, valuable, worthwhile and so on. His is the assumption that the adult individual may have thousands of beliefs and convictions, only hundreds of attitudes, and a few dozen values.

The influence of attitudes on behavior is a controversial issue in social psychology. Different researchers often reach mutually exclusive conclusions. For example, Wicker's (1969) experiments lead him to the conclusion that it is likely that attitudes are weakly or not at all related to the types of behavior that can be observed, rather the opposite. However, other serious authors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) refute this view and propose models describing the influence of attitudes on behavior.

Temperament, beliefs, convictions, attitudes and value system leave an imprint on the way a subordinate (or a follower) interprets the situation and perceives the manager (the leader). Thus, the behavior of the manager can be interpreted differently by each of his/her subordinates. In some of them it can evoke sympathy, in others hatred. The follower's explanation of the leader's actions determines follower's opinion and behavior. Therefore, it is important to know the mechanism by which inferior employees attribute causes for certain behavior to superiors.

In psychology, the supposed cause of an individual's behavior is called causal attribution. The formation of attributions about the leader's behavior can be explained using Kelley's model (Kelley & Michela, 1980). According to it, they are formed after collecting information about three dimensions of observed behavior – consensus, distinctiveness and consistency. Consensus involves comparing the behavior of an individual (in this case the manager) with that of his/her peers (other managers). High consensus is present when the manager does everything as the other organizational members of the same hierarchical level do. Distinctiveness refers to a comparison of a manager's behavior in making or implementing a certain decision with his/her behavior in making or implementing other decisions. Accordingly, high distinctiveness will mean that the manager made (executed) the decision in a different way compared to previous similar decisions. Consistency reflects the manager's assessment of similar phenomena.

If the results of Kelley's research are followed, it can be assumed that in case of high consensus, high distinctiveness and low consistency, followers will tend to explain their leader's behavior with external factors (external attribution). Internal causes for the leader's behavior will be sought in case of low consensus and distinctiveness and high consistency. In other words, if followers form an opinion that the manager's actions significantly differ from other superiors and that he/she regularly makes most decisions independently, they will assume that the causes for this are internal, i.e. the manager is authoritarian by nature.

ORIENTATION TOWARDS AUTHORITY AND FOLLOWERSHIP STYLE

Based on what has been said so far, it can be summarized that subordinates' relationships with the manager are influenced by certain attributions, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and value systems. These are based on the individual's *orientation towards authority* (Kotsev, 2021). With some minor variations in each particular individual, the principle orientation of each employee towards superiors is roughly the same. Regardless of the fact that he/she may be forced by his/her manager to behave in a certain way, his/her fundamental beliefs about the nature of the inferior-superior relationship do not change significantly. Therefore, it can be assumed that the principled orientation of the employee towards the immediate supervisor is the basis of his/her followership style. According to Panayotov (1999), a specific style represents a combination of manner, personal biases, peculiarities of the Ego, characterology and specificity of group relations, requirements of the relevant role in the hierarchy, burden of obedience. Of interest is the question of whether changing some of these elements can lead to a change in style as a whole.

More recent research shows that over a long enough period of time, the followership style can change (Kotsev, 2022). It is already clear that in the formation of human attitudes and understandings, all social groups in which the individual belonged or still belongs have an influence (Graham & Bennett, 1995). In other words, the followership style also depends to some extent on

the individual's experience gained during his/her professional life in observing and interacting with other organizational members – superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

Over time, the employee's orientation towards authority may also change. But like most beliefs and convictions it tend to persist because the factors that form it are almost permanent. Newly received information from the external environment often confirms previous observations, and the way it is processed and interpreted by the employee is influenced by previously created impressions and beliefs. In the relatively rare cases where new data contradicts an already established belief, the subordinate is inclined, if not to reject it entirely, at least to modify it in the direction of already existing beliefs. Thus, the followership style acquires relative stability.

Based on these considerations, the following definition can be formulated:

The followership style of each employee is a relatively stable system of methods and techniques based on experience and beliefs, which characterizes the pattern of his/her practical activity as a subordinate.

FOLLOWRSHIP BEHAVIOR VERSUS FOLLOWERSHIP STYLE

Under favourable conditions, the followership style finds expression in certain behavioral characteristics of the individual. But the followership behavior is more susceptible to change than employee's followership style. Apart from persistent internal factors, individual behavior is also determined by situation-specific dimensions of the external environment. Often the situation suggests behavior that contrasts with the internal orientation of the subordinate. For example, if an employee is proactive in nature and generally tends to participate in the decision-making process together with his/her supervisor, this can be seen as an element of his/her followership style. However, this element will remain hidden under an authoritarian leader who prefers subordinates to follow instructions and directions. Outwardly, the subordinate will comply with the manager's wishes by behaving in the manner expected by superior. But this would not change subordinate's inner principled conviction regarding participation in decision-making.

The difference between followership style and behavior makes employee self-analysis difficult in the relationship with the manager. The appearance of an intrapersonal conflict is possible. In most cases, the subordinate easily recognizes this state, but accepts it as part of the challenges of his/her job and as a necessary condition for good interaction with the superior. However, practice shows that the approach of unreservedly conforming the behavior to the manager's understanding and requirements rarely favors both the relationship between the two in particular, and the achievement of organizational goals in general (Kotsev, 2022). The attitude of the subordinate when following such an approach expresses a desire for a comfortable and peaceful "coexistence" with the superior rather than a desire for effective and full-fledged interaction.

CONCLUSION

From the point of view of the interests of the organization, it is much more correct to assess what type of relations to the highest degree contribute to increasing employee's efficiency. Indeed, when there is not enough time for discussion and quick action is required, it is better for the subordinate to accept the implementer role. But when the task involves the exercise of creativity, the subordinate must participate in the decision-making process. The work of the manager, and the performance of the organization as a whole, can only benefit from the diversity of opinions and ideas.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1970). The prediction of behavior from attitudinal and normative variables. *Journal of experimental social Psychology*, 6(4), 466-487.

Aizen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall.

Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(3), 39-43.

Anggriani, N. (2023). Behaviorism category of individual Behavior profile. *Indonesian Journal Education*, *2*(3), 16-20.

Ertmer, P. A., & Newby, T. J. (2013). Behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism: Comparing critical features from an instructional design perspective. *Performance Improvement Quarterly, 26*(2), 43-71

Hristova, T., & Hristov, T. (1998). Organisational Behavior. TedIna, Varna (***Оригинално заглавие****: Христова, Т. и Т. Христов, 1998. Организационно поведение, ТедИна, Варна).*

Graham, H., & Bennett, R. (1995). Human Resources Management, Eight Edition, Pitman Publishing, UK.

Gross, R. D. (1987). *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior*, Edward Arnold.

Kelley, H. H., & Michela, J. L. (1980). Attribution theory and research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *31*(1), 457-501.

Kotsev, E. (2021). The dual role of managers as an object and subject of influence. *XVII International May Conference on Strategic Management – IMCSM 21*, 46-56.

Kotsev, E. (2022). Knowing when and how to trust superiors' decisions: Toward a conceptual model of subordinate managers' behaviour. *Organizacija*, 55, 50-63.

Myers, M. D. (2019). *Qualitative Research in Business and Managemen*t, SAGE Publications Ltd.

Panayotov, D. (1999). Psychology of Management. Success Paradigm. Economy University Press. Sofia (***Оригинално заглавие****: Панайотов, Д. 1999. Психология на управлението. Парадигма на успеха, УИ "Стопанство", С.*).

Rennie, D. L. (2007). Methodical hermeneutics and humanistic psychology. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *35*(1), 1-14.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2019). Research Methods for Business Students. 8th edition, Pearson Education Limited.

Schneider, B. (1982). *Interactional psychology and organizational behavior*. Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Department of Psychology, Michigan State University.

Travnik, I. D. C., Machado, D. D. S., Gonçalves, L. D. S., Ceballos, M. C., & Sant'Anna, A. C. (2020). Temperament in domestic cats: a review of proximate mechanisms, methods of assessment, its effects on human—cat relationships, and one welfare. *Animals*, *10*(9), 1516.

Wicker, A., (1969). Attitudes versus actions. The relationship of verbal and overt behavior responses to attitude objects, *Journal of Social Issues*, 25(4), 41-78.