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How the Tables Have Turned

Follower influence in the co-construction of leadership

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Acknowledgements

During the last couple of months we have spent most of our days working on this thesis and we have finally reached an end on this long but fun process. However, reaching this end would not have been possible without help and input from others. Firstly, we want to acknowledge and thank our supervisor Anna Stevenson who came with lots of feedback and some hard truths that ultimately led to us improving our thesis. Secondly, we would also like to thank Nadja Sörgärde who throughout this semester has taught us how to write a great thesis as well as the ins and outs of management. Thirdly, we would also like to thank the other students on the course. Feedback that we have received from you has given us new perspectives that have helped us improve our thesis. Fourthly, we want to thank the R&D company that were willing to open their doors to us and all the interviewees that were willing to answer our questions. Lastly, we would also like to thank each other. We all feel that it has been a delight to work together and to challenge ourselves.

We hope you have a pleasant couple of hours reading.

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Sammanfattning

Examensarbetets titel:	How the Tables Have Turned: Follower influence in the co-construction of leadership
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Fem nyckelord:	Anställda, följarskap, ledarskap, beteenden, påverkan
Forskningsfråga:	<i>Hur samkonstruerar följare och ledare ledarskap?</i>
Syfte:	Syftet med denna studie är att nyansera och bidra till en djupare förståelse kring ledare och följares samkonstruktion av ledarskap.
Metod:	För att uppnå syftet har en kvalitativ intervjustudie genomförts med chefer och anställda på ett forskningsbolag. Semistrukturerade intervjuer utfördes med sammanlagt sex respondenter. Studien antar en konstruktionistisk ontologisk position och en induktiv ansats.
Teoretiska perspektiv:	Teoriavsnittet behandlar tidigare forskning inom följarskapsteorier med fokus på det konstruktionistiska perspektivet.
Analys:	I analysen framförs hur chefer och anställda konstruerar imaginära gränser kring påverkan. Sedan presenteras hur dessa gränser flyttas och påverkan som detta har på ledarskap.
Slutsats:	Sammanfattningsvis hittades två olika beteendetyper, möjliggörande och hindrande. Vidare upptäcktes hur följare använder dessa beteenden för att flytta på gränsen vilket påverkar deras möjligheter till att influera ledare.

Abstract

Title:	How the Tables Have Turned: Follower influence in the co-construction of leadership
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Authors:	Cleveson, Adrian; Majegård, Jakob; Svensson, Felix
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Key words:	Followers, followership, leadership, behaviors, influence
Research question:	<i>How do followers and leaders co-construct leadership?</i>
Purpose:	The purpose of this study is to nuance and contribute to a deeper understanding of how leaders and followers co-construct leadership.
Methodology:	In order to fulfill the study's purpose, a qualitative interview study has been conducted with management and employees at a research company. Semi-structured interviews were held with a total of six respondents. The study takes a constructionist ontological position with an inductive approach.
Theoretical perspectives:	The theory chapter discusses previous research on followership theories with a focus on the constructionist perspective.
Analysis:	The analysis presents how managers and subordinates create imaginary boundaries that impact their view on influence. Moreover, the analysis presents how these boundaries can be moved and the effect that it has on leadership.
Conclusion:	The study found that followers engage in enabling and disabling behavior to move their boundary which in turn affects their ability to influence leaders.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Sammanfattning

Abstract

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Problematization	3
1.3 Purpose and Research Question	5
1.4 Disposition	6
2. Theory	7
2.1 Followership	7
2.2 Getting Specific	7
2.2.1 The Role-based View on Followership	8
2.2.2 The Constructionist View on Followership	8
2.3 Aspects of the Constructionist Viewpoint	9
2.4 Follower Behaviors	11
2.4.1 Obedience and Subordination	11
2.4.2 Resistance	12
2.4.3 Proactive Behavior	12
2.5 Positioning of the Study	13
3. Method	14
3.1 Methodological Basis	14
3.2 Data Collection	15
3.2.1 Choosing Our Study Object	15
3.2.2 The Company	16
3.2.3 Gathering Data	16
3.3 Data Analysis Process	18
3.4 Limitations	19
3.5 Ethical Considerations	20
3.6 Quality of Qualitative Research	21
4. Analysis	23
4.1 The Boundary of Influence	23
4.1.1 A Manager's Boundary	23
4.1.2 A Subordinate's Boundary	26
4.2 Moving the Boundary	28
4.2.1 Influence Through Enabling and Disabling Behavior	28
4.2.2 Influence Through Resources	34
4.3 Summary	36
5. Discussion	37
5.1 The struggle for power in organizations	37
5.2 The Power of Resources	38
5.3 Crossing the Boundary	39
6. Conclusion	41
6.1 The Findings	41
6.2 The Problems	42
6.3 The Future	42
7. References	44

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Throughout history there have been many great leaders, leaders that have successfully accomplished their goals. These leaders have been active in many different areas such as politics, militaries and business. Martin Luther King Jr., the face and leader of the anti-segregation movement in the United States succeeded in creating awareness of the unfair treatment of black people in the United States and made great strides in advancing the treatment of people of color (Carson & Lewis, 2023). The business leader Henry Ford revolutionized manufacturing by creating the assembly line production principle that made it possible for the common man to afford cars (Gelderman, 2023). However, some accomplishments of leaders have had a negative effect on society; Adolf Hitler, the leader of Nazi Germany, ordered the murder of six million jews and also caused the second world war (Bullock, Bullock, Knapp & Lukacs, 2023). These negative consequences can also be found in other areas of society, for example business. Richard S. Fuld, the last CEO of Lehman Brothers, led the investment bank to bankruptcy which catalyzed the 2008 global economic crisis (Berkrot, 2008). However, these leaders would not have accomplished anything without one key element, their followers.

Leadership is a hotly debated area of research but despite vast amounts of both academic and public literature on the topic, the understanding of the phenomenon is limited (Burns, 1978. cited in Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe & Carsten (2014) argue that the reason for this is because leadership research has largely ignored the fact that without followers there can be no leaders and that therefore, more focus needs to be on followership. A reason for the neglect in the studying of followers and followership could be our glorification of leaders. Humans have a tendency to attribute both success and failures with the person or people in charge and glorify the leader, as in the romance of leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985). Most of us will be followers for the major part of our lives and there is no guarantee that we will ever become leaders (Jackson & Parry 2011). Since we glorify leadership and often attribute both success and failure to leaders we rarely want to realize that most of us will be followers during most of our lives. Nonetheless, everyday people do become leaders. They become team leaders, department heads and COOs. It is not uncommon that we forget these leaders since they are not as glorious as Martin Luther King

Jr. or Henry Ford. However, even Martin Luther King Jr. and Henry Ford were not leaders from the beginning. Similarly to the team leader, the department head and the COO, they worked themselves up from being a follower to a leader. Therefore it becomes important to study everyone else, namely the followers. On the other hand, the term *follower* in and of itself is rather problematic. The word *follower* has a negative tone to it, potentially giving people an image of someone that blindly follows without questioning, a person without any kind of power (Jackson & Parry, 2011). There have been attempts to use different terms instead of the negatively loaded follower, terms such as “partners”, “participants” and “constituents” (Uhl- Bien, 2006). However, we believe that the word follower does not need to be perceived as negative. Instead followers should be viewed as powerful, people that not only follow but also influence their leader.

Despite the strong connection to hierarchy, the relational component plays a big part in how leadership is constructed with Heller and Van Til stating that “leadership and followership are roles that are best seen in relationship” (1982, p. 406). This indicates how leadership and followership are integrated with each other and that one cannot exist without the other. One cannot be a leader without someone that follows and one cannot be a follower without someone that leads. Uhl-Bien and Pillai describe the leader-follower relationship as “if leadership involves actively influencing others, followership involves allowing oneself to be influenced” (2007, p. 196). As we move towards a more knowledge-intensive society, followers’ expectations on leaders change (Kellerman, 2007). This also applies for leaders who have different expectations of their followers now compared to a hundred years ago (Kellerman, 2007). Furthermore, Kellerman (2007) argues that followers are not a homogeneous group and that their attitudes, behaviors, and motivations can vary widely. Therefore, it is important to study the social interaction between them and leaders. This study will, based on the formal hierarchy in the organization, investigate the relationship between leaders and followers by focusing on how they co-construct leadership.

1.2 Problematization

Followership is an important part of organizations, however it has received far less attention than leadership. Jackson and Parry (2011) state how they, before writing their book, searched for leadership and followership on Amazon. They found that there was an extensive amount of books on leadership but barely any on followership. This notion is also reflected by the number of available academic papers on Google Scholar when searching for the two terms. Searching for “leadership” gave us 5 250 000 results (Google Scholar, 2023a) while “followership” only yielded around 34 000 results (Google Scholar, 2023b). Given the importance that followers have for leadership, the lack of research within the area of “followership” makes the continual study of followers essential.

Despite the limited research conducted on the topic, several aspects of followership have been considered in the existing literature. There are follower-centered leadership theories such as the romance of leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985), implicit leadership theory (Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Rush, Thomas & Lord, 1977) and social identity theory (Chemers, 2001; Hogg, 2001; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) explains the romanticization of leadership as a way of regulating explanations of success or failure. The social identity theory postulates that a leader’s effectiveness is dependent on how well they fit their followers’ group identity (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Implicit leadership theory assumes that followers have a preconceived image of how a leader is supposed to be, based on past experiences (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Schyns & Meindl, 2005), and judged on how well they fit these preconceptions (Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Rush, Thomas & Lord, 1977). Even though Jackson and Parry (2011) illustrate that these three leadership theories are valuable to understand how followers shape leadership, Crossman and Crossman (2011) argue that these leadership theories mainly focus on understanding leadership and as such, they should not be applied to further our understanding of followership. Furthermore, theories regarding multiple leaders have similar problems. Shared leadership is an idea that leadership is shared among organizational members (Carson, Tesluk and Marrone, 2007). Distributed leadership supposes that leadership happens spontaneously in the interaction between members of an organization (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2005). Both theories focus on the leader's perspective, trying to understand the idea of multiple leaders, not multiple followers. Uhl-Bien, Graen and Scandura (2000, cited in Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe & Carsten, 2014) highlight how many of the theories regarding multiple leaders view the formal leader as the

driver in the construction of the leader-follower relationship. Furthermore, followers are often connected with negative connotations and leaders have been romanticized when looking at it from the leader-centric perspective (Hopton, Christie & Barling, 2015; Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). For this reason, it becomes relevant to bring followers into the spotlight.

This brings us to the theories that completely focus on the followers in the follower-leader relationship. In followership theory this relationship can be viewed from two perspectives, a role-based and a constructionist based (Uhl-Bien, et.al, 2014). The role-based viewpoint sees followers and leaders as part of a hierarchy (Uhl-Bien et.al, 2014). However, what the role-based viewpoint also highlights are different typologies and characteristics, thus dividing individuals into static roles (Uhl-Bien et.al, 2014). The constructionist viewpoint on the other hand, sees leadership and followership as a phenomenon constructed through an interactive process between individuals in an organization, thus regarding followers to fill dynamic roles (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). However, the constructionist viewpoint does not view formal hierarchical positions as the establisher of leader and follower roles, instead viewing it as a social and reciprocal process centered around how we behave towards and talk with each other (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Collinson, 2006). The role-based and constructionist perspectives are important for followership research since they give us two different views that help us understand the role of followers and leaders.

Despite their importance for understanding followership, the two perspectives are not without flaws. One problem with the role-based perspective is that it views followers and their roles as static (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), without consideration taken to the multi-faceted nature of humans and social interaction. The constructionist perspective tries to account for this by focusing on the dynamic interactions between leaders and followers. However, a problem with this perspective is that it tends to be quite leader-centric. Collinson (2006), for example, looks at how leaders' behaviors impact followers' construction of their identity whilst Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) study the discourse regarding leadership. As a result, to better understand followership and the role that followers play in the leader-follower relationship we believe that more focus needs to be put on how followers and leaders together construct leadership and the role that influence has in this construction. Although some studies have been conducted that study the followers and leaders co-construction of leadership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Collinson, 2006), research has not been

conducted specifically on the role that follower influence plays in this construction. Research on this specific area could help bring a better understanding on followership and the leader-follower relationship.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to provide a perspective on followership in order to contribute to the already existing literature. This will be achieved by highlighting how followers influence their leaders and the effect that this influence has on leadership. We will take a constructionist view on followership. This will not only bring a theoretical contribution but also have organizational implications. Firstly, it will help subordinates understand how they can impact their managers. Secondly, managers can receive a better understanding regarding how subordinates influence their leaders. Thirdly, a combined understanding from both subordinates and managers can together help increase organizational efficiency. To achieve the purpose we will aim to answer the following question:

How do followers and leaders co-construct leadership?

To answer this question we will conduct our study at a R&D company where we will interview both leaders and followers.

1.4 Disposition

This paper consists of six parts: introduction, theory, methodology, analysis of empirical data, discussion and conclusion.

The theory chapter succeeds the introduction and discusses previous research on the topic as well as establishes the theoretical foundations for this study. Here, we will take a look at followership as well as declaring the definitions and theoretical vocabulary that will be used in this study. We also present research on follower behaviors that will be used to contextualize the empirical data. In the methodology section, we will present the epistemological and ontological positions of the study and describe the process of collecting and analyzing the data. We will also discuss the limitations with the study as well as ethical considerations. We then progress to the analysis of the collected data where we will present and analyze the results from our interviews. Following this, we will discuss the results in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical contributions of this study. Finally, in the paper's concluding chapter, our conclusions will be presented together with the theoretical and practical implications of our findings. We will also discuss limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. Theory

This chapter aims to establish and define followership, discuss possible problems with the theoretical areas as well as presenting the theoretical area in which we aim to contribute. To achieve this, we will first present followership. Secondly, we contrast the different views of followership as well as presenting the viewpoint that will be used in this study. Thirdly, we will describe different theories regarding the co-construction of leadership as well as different behaviors associated with followers. These two theoretical areas will aid us in analyzing and discussing the empirical material.

2.1 Followership

The idea of followership is the study of how followers are able to impact, influence and be a part of a leadership process (Uhl-Bien, et.al, 2014). Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) explain that leaders are able to impact followers through changing the perception the followers have of themselves. Followership could be seen as a dynamic process in which followers and leaders interact with each other (Hollander, 1992; Lord, Brown & Freiberg, 1999). A traditional leader-follower relationship is characterized by a closed dynamism, with leaders directing their followers and setting a direction for them, comparable to a parent-child relationship (Hollander, 1992). However, followership could also be seen as social construction, thus creating a role where the follower plays an active part in the leader-follower relationship (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Followership could therefore be seen through two different lenses: followership as a formal position and followership as a social construction, both of which will be discussed in the following part of the theoretical chapter.

2.2 Getting Specific

The aim of the upcoming part of the theoretical chapter is to create a comprehensive understanding of followership. This will be achieved by introducing the two ways in which followers are often viewed. Both of these viewpoints are relevant to create an understanding of followership. However, since our study takes a constructionist approach, we will only briefly describe the role-based viewpoint before delving even deeper into the constructionist perspective.

2.2.1 The Role-based View on Followership

As the name suggests, the role-based view presumes the hierarchical roles regarding leadership and followership (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014). The main focus of this approach is to interpret how followers are able to affect the organizational outcomes positively or negatively (Oc, Bashshur & Moore, 2014). Another central aspect of the role-based view is a focus on different follower typologies with their associated characteristics (Zaleznik, 1965; Kelley, 1988; Kellerman, 2007; Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; 2013). By ascribing certain characteristics to followers based on typologies, you essentially put individuals into boxes, disregarding the nuance in between them. There is also no consideration of how their behavior might change depending on the situation. A problem with viewing the leader-follower relationship from a role-based perspective is that you are limiting the scope to only include formal positions based on the organizational hierarchy (Jackson & Parry, 2011). Additionally, Jackson and Parry (2011) elaborate that if you are in a leadership position, you are supposed to act as a leader. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien, (1995) the role-based approach focuses on how follower attributes and actions are able to develop into desired results. To conclude, the role-based view of followership is mainly seen from the organizational chart viewing roles, behaviors and typologies as static. However, it also emphasizes followers' ability to impact the organization.

2.2.2 The Constructionist View on Followership

A constructionist perspective views leadership and followership as something socially constructed in a process where people interact with each other (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Advocates of a constructionist view believe that it is the behaviors, relationships and identities of followers and leaders that are constructed through interactions (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Furthermore, these interactions and relationships that are formed do not need to be bound to any hierarchical system (Uhl-Bien, et.al, 2014). Unlike a role-based view of followership and leadership, this indicates the possibility of non-hierarchical leaders such as informal leaders or shared leadership. Furthermore, one of the main considerations of a constructionist perspective is that leaders engage in influence attempts whilst followers engage in granting behaviors – behaviors that allow leaders to lead (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Followers can also engage in their own influence attempts to counteract attempts of leadership (Tepper, Duffy & Shaw, 2001). A constructionist

perspective works as the obverse to a role-based perspective, allowing participants to take on different roles in different contexts.

2.3 Aspects of the Constructionist Viewpoint

Although the main idea of the constructionist perspective is viewing followership as a social process there are different aspects in the literature that need to be lifted. The aspects center around how the roles of followers and leaders are produced and highlight a variety of ways in which the process occurs. The terms presented in this part of the chapter, that center around how the aforementioned process will be vital in our discussion of the empirical material.

DuRue and Ashford (2010) present a constructionist view where the follower and leader roles are created through what they call claiming and granting processes. According to the authors a claiming process occurs when an individual bestows either a leader or follower role upon themselves. Granting processes, on the other hand, DeRue and Ashford (2010) describe as a process where an individual bestows a follower or leader role upon someone else.

Furthermore, they also argue that in order for these two roles to be attached to individuals, the granting and claiming processes need to be supported by others. This means that a manager cannot claim a leader role without their subordinate also granting them a leader role. In contrast to the granting and claiming process that DeRue and Ashford (2010) present, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) take a discursive approach focusing on the interpersonal interactions between leaders and followers to understand how leader and follower roles are enacted and enhanced. Followers can be viewed as actors who engage, interact and negotiate with leaders in order to influence outcomes (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). This perspective looks at leadership as being co-constructed by leaders and followers through a relational process. Uhl-Bien et al. state that “[f]ollowership and leadership can be seen in how individuals act and respond in relational control moves, in mobilizing moves, in language games” (2014, pp. 95). However, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) do not study followership but rather the possibility of using organizational discourse analysis to understand leadership as a relational process. Therefore, one can question how relevant their findings are for establishing a better understanding of followership.

In addition, Collinson (2006) has also applied the constructionist perspective, focusing on follower identities by utilizing a post-structuralist analysis. This approach presumes that people's lives are well connected with society at large and that identity regulation is a central topic (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Collinson's (2006) usage of a post-structuralist analysis, made it possible to identify how individuals cooperate during submission. Three identities were identified: the conformist selves, resistant selves and dramaturgical selves. The conformist selves are aligned with ideal behaviors, which could be characterized by obedience towards managers, being driven and knowledgeable (Collinson, 2006). The resistant selves are followers that are, as the name suggests, resistant towards decisions (Collinson, 2006). These follower identities are thus created during times of disagreements and implies that leaders are not able to control their followers' feelings, opinions, perceptions or identities (Collinson, 2006). The last follower identity, dramaturgical selves, are followers that are conscious of surveillance from management (Collinson, 2006). The awareness of monitoring from managers makes the followers behave in a way that efficiently influences their leaders (Collinson, 1999). Therefore, the dramaturgical selves can either possess the characteristics of the conformist, resistant or a combination of the two.

The constructionist view of followership challenges the traditional view of followers as a passive agent. This view suggests that followers play an active role in shaping the leader-follower relationship and should be viewed as collaborators rather than subordinates. One implication of the constructionist view is, as Collinson (2006) as well as DeRue and Ashford (2010) present, that follower behaviors play a vital role in the construction of follower and leader roles. Another implication is, as Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) initiated, the possibility to use organizational discourse analysis as a way to understand the relational process that creates leadership and the possibility to use the same method to understand followership. A focus on behaviors and the relational process makes it possible for us to understand the impact that the behaviors of followers and leaders play in the social construction process of follower and leader roles (Larsson & Lundholm, 2013). As a result, it is vital to present the different behaviors that followers often enact in different organizational situations.

2.4 Follower Behaviors

Within follower- and leadership research, followers are often characterized as passive, mainly because of the hierarchical structure of organizations (Barnard, 1938). However, there are multiple ways in which the passive follower could behave depending on the dynamic at the workplace (Uhl-Bien, et al., 2014). Furthermore, because of the changes in organizations that are happening, more and more followers are becoming active rather than passive (Kellerman, 2007). This entails another set of behaviors that are not linked to a passive follower role. In the upcoming sections we aim to present three different categories of behaviors linked to both passive and active follower roles. These behaviors are obedience and subordination, resistance and proactive behavior.

2.4.1 Obedience and Subordination

The conventional way of viewing followers is, as mentioned above, viewing them as passive due to the hierarchy of organizations (Barnard, 1938). Building upon this, Weber (1968) explains that managers in the upper levels of the hierarchy could be seen as powerful individuals that carry more power, are able to accomplish more than others and are more efficient. Therefore, the obedient and subordinate followers see leaders as problem solvers and information providers that set common goals for the organization (De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005). In a study conducted by Courpasson and Dany, (2003) in which followers were allowed to act according to themselves without being restricted by any rules or norms, the authors found that independence is not desirable in companies since these organizations are often steered through common goals and norms in order to be efficient. Additionally, obedience and disobedience were found to not be individual behaviors, but instead shaped by social norms and expectations (Courpasson & Dany 2003). These are formed through collective processes, such as group decision-making and cultural practices, and are legitimized within these processes in order to normalize these behaviors (Courpasson & Dany 2003). Furthermore, this illustrates that subordination and obedience are ways to avoid chaos in organizations through rules, norms and common goals when they are legitimized through a collective process. Therefore, when followers are subordinate and obedient it helps unite organizations to reach their goals. However, this begs the question whether or not followers always are subordinate and obedient.

2.4.2 Resistance

Moving away from the traditional view of the follower as someone passive brings us to the idea of followers that do not follow. Tepper, Duffy and Shaw (2001) argue that resistance is a behavior most common in followers when they react to abusive supervision from managers. Furthermore, they identify two types of resistance, constructive and dysfunctional. According to Tepper, Duffy and Shaw (2001) constructive resistance are attempts from followers to create dialogue between subordinates and managers to achieve changes in the abusive leadership. On the other hand, dysfunctional resistance is presented by the authors as resistance that does not aim to improve the relationship. Behaviors that are associated with dysfunctional resistance center around followers not conducting the tasks assigned to them (Tepper, Duffy & Shaw, 2001). Dysfunctional resistance is often a consequence of followers perceiving the treatment by managers as unfair and a desire to retaliate against management (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Falbe and Yukl (1992) have found that resistance, no matter what kind, is perceived as an annoyance for managers. In regards to these findings, Tepper, Uhl-Bien, Kohut, Rogelberg, Lockhart and Ensley (2006) found that most followers use constructive resistance tools but leaders are only receptive to these tools when they come from certain followers. Although the literature on the area of resistant behavior among followers is relatively extensive, there is one issue worth lifting: the idea that resistance only occurs as a result of abusive leadership.

2.4.3 Proactive Behavior

If we view followers as having an active role in the leader-follower relationship we can consider behaviors such as those Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) define as proactive behaviors. According to the authors, these behaviors are deliberate actions that followers take to influence, change or alter their environment. They list behaviors including influence tactics, feedback-seeking, taking charge behavior, prosocial rule-breaking, personal initiative taking, influencing work structures, and voice. The concept of proactivity in the organizational literature addresses a broad range of issues (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). However, for the study of followership, the most relevant questions are how followers engage in proactive behaviors in relation to leaders as well as how leaders receive and respond to these behaviors since proactivity from followers is not always welcomed (Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2012; Grant, Parker & Collins, 2009). The evaluation of proactive behaviors are

contingent on numerous factors, including the message itself, source, context as well as mediating factors such as liking, perceived prosocial motives and perceived constructiveness (Whiting et al., 2012). The leadership style, overall relationship quality and work climate also affects how the behaviors are received (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). This contextual complexity leads proactive behaviors to engender somewhat aleatory consequences.

2.5 Positioning of the Study

Previous research has often aimed to establish an understanding of the different behaviors that followers have (Tepper, Duffy & Shaw, 2001; De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005).

However, much of the research ignores the capacity for influence that subordinates have in the leader-follower relationship. Some research has looked at how leaders receive and respond to followers' proactive behavior (Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2012; Grant, Parker & Collins, 2009). However, these studies do not investigate the impact that this proactive behavior has on the construction of leadership. The construction of leadership has been studied before, mainly by DeRue and Ashford (2010), Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) as well as Collinson (2006). However, these studies do not take into account follower influence and its impact on the construction of leadership. Therefore, we position this study to investigate the impact of follower influence in leaders and followers co-construction of leadership.

With the increased follower power and changing demands on leadership (Kellerman, 2007) we also position this study to look at how followers are able to influence leaders and co-construct leadership in horizontally structured organizations. In these types of organizations, the hierarchical distance is short and leader-follower interactions are more frequent. These factors allow followers to exercise more influence over their leaders (Oc & Bashshur, 2013). Additionally, since the demands on leadership have changed with a large increase of follower power (Kellerman, 2007), which blurs the lines between leader and follower in the hierarchy. This change in the leader-follower relationship requires new ways of understanding how leadership is constructed. We believe that applying a constructionist perspective, that focuses on social interactions between leaders and followers and how leadership is constructed through those interactions would make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature.

3. Method

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used in this study. The study utilizes a qualitative, inductive, and interpretative approach based on a constructionist ontological position. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive explanation of the chosen methodology, including the research object, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The chapter begins with a justification for the chosen methodology, followed by a detailed description of the data collection process. The chapter then discusses the steps taken for data analysis and limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter addresses ethical considerations and the credibility and reliability of the study. Overall, this chapter serves to establish the foundation of the research and provide a clear understanding of how the study was conducted.

3.1 Methodological Basis

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). It also allows for flexibility in data collection and analysis, enabling us to be responsive to emergent themes and ideas (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Furthermore, qualitative research is consistent with the interpretative and constructionist approach of the study, allowing for a deeper understanding of the social processes that shape followership and leadership.

The inductive approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for the exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences without imposing preconceived notions or theoretical frameworks. This approach acknowledges that the participants' experiences are unique and that meaning is constructed through social interactions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Therefore, the study will start with an open-ended research question, allowing us to explore the data inductively and generate new insights and understandings based solely on the empirical data.

In the constructionist view of ontology, social phenomena and their meanings are constructed and continually revised by the participating actors through social interactions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In this study, we acknowledge that meaning is not inherent in events, but rather constructed through social processes. This perspective provides a lens for exploring

how a phenomenon is constructed through social interactions and personal experiences. This entails that we will study how followers and leaders co-construct leadership and the role that follower influence has in this construction.

Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study as they provide a consistent framework for exploring the research question while allowing for flexibility in the data collection process (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This approach enables us to explore the participants' perspectives and experiences in depth while also ensuring that the research question is consistently addressed. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow for the possibility to follow up on emergent themes and ideas, providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

In conclusion, the chosen methodology for this study is a qualitative, inductive, and interpretative approach based on social constructionism. This methodology is appropriate for investigating followership in an R&D company, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews provides a consistent framework for data collection while also allowing for flexibility and responsiveness to emergent themes and ideas. The use of social constructionism provides a theoretical lens for understanding how followership is constructed through social interactions, while the inductive approach allows for new insights and understandings to emerge from the data.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Choosing Our Study Object

The process for selecting a company began with identifying potential companies to participate in our study. We identified these first 20 companies, based on two main criteria. Firstly, we looked at their geographical location. Since it is preferable to have interviews in person (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) we searched for companies that we could easily access through public transport in and around Lund, Sweden. Secondly, we also searched for companies with between 20 and 70 employees. The reason for this is because we felt that this span would make it possible for us to clearly identify leaders and followers. We discussed conducting this study in a start-up but decided not to due to a fear of these start-ups having a

simple organizational structure. According to Daft, Murphy and Willmott (2020) this can make it difficult to clearly identify roles and areas of responsibility within the company.

After having identified these 20 companies, we selected 9 that we thought were particularly interesting, either because of their product or organizational philosophy, and subsequently contacted them via email. Fortunately, a research company responded quickly and a meeting with a contact person was scheduled to determine if the study could be conducted at the company. During the meeting, we were given a presentation on the organizational structure and areas of research conducted at the company. The contact person agreed to ask managers and employees if they would be willing to participate in the study and promptly followed up with an email to schedule a first interview. This process enabled us to select a company that was both geographically accessible and had the potential to provide valuable insights for the study.

3.2.2 The Company

As mentioned above, the company that was selected for this study is a research company. The company is structured in such a way where for every new product or area of study, a new subsidiary is created that is run independently, but still under the same roof as the parent company. The parent company provides support functions such as marketing and financing. This makes the organizational structure relatively flat. Furthermore, since the company is a research company, its employees are highly educated and the business can thus be characterized as being knowledge-intensive. In terms of our study where we aim to examine the leader-follower relationship, we consider the leaders of this organization to be the management of the parent company. Consequently, the support staff in the parent company as well as the researchers and other employees in the subsidiaries are considered as followers.

3.2.3 Gathering Data

The interviews were conducted with the help of two interview guides, one for followers and one for leaders. Despite the use of interview guides in semi-structured interviews, they still allow for flexibility to explore additional topics (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The interview guides consist of introductory questions, open questions, follow-up questions, and indirect questions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Upon conducting the first interview, we

noticed that some of the follow-up questions that arose would be interesting to ask others as well and were subsequently added to the interview guide. Furthermore, after the first two interviews with followers, we noticed that some questions were not fully aligned with the purpose of the study and a handful that needed clarification. Resultantly, the interview guide for followers was revised to improve brevity and clarity in order to generate responses that better assist in answering our research question.

The purpose of these questions is to identify patterns, potential issues, differences, and to investigate how followers act to influence their leaders in the co-construction of leadership. As such, the purpose of the interview questions aligns with the study's constructionist perspective, which emphasizes the importance of employee and managerial experiences. The responses from the interviewees will therefore provide multiple perspectives that can be interpreted and compared to develop a cohesive understanding of the observed phenomena.

At first, we had planned to conduct the interviews in English since that is the language with which we have written this paper. However, after consulting with our supervisor, we decided to do the interviews in Swedish when possible and work with the data in Swedish, only translating the quotes presented in the final paper. More specifically, we decided to have the interviews either in English or Swedish depending on what the interviewees were most comfortable with. This decision was made because we wanted the respondents to be able to express themselves as accurately as possible. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The audio recordings were securely stored, and the transcripts were anonymized to ensure participant anonymity. The transcripts served as the primary data source for the study, and they were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach which will be described and discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The chosen method of data collection is appropriate for this study as it allows for a rich exploration of participants' perspectives on followership. Semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to probe for deeper understanding and to explore participants' individual experiences and perceptions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Additionally, the use of audio recording and verbatim transcription ensures that the data is reliable and accurate.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

The data collected from the interviews was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis involved an iterative process of familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and defining and naming themes. The themes were reviewed and refined multiple times to ensure their coherence and relevance to the research question. We also sought to identify and discuss any contradictions or outliers in the data.

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011) lay forth a step-by-step process for analyzing qualitative material which includes sorting, reducing and arguing. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011), the first step of the analysis is to familiarize yourself with the material. This was accomplished by thoroughly reading the transcribed interviews several times by all group members. After familiarizing ourselves with the data, we started the initial coding process. This process is described by Charmaz and Belgrave as “constructing short labels that describe, dissect, and distill the data while preserving their essential properties” (2012, pp. 356). They also differentiate between initial coding and selective or focused coding. The former requires the researcher to make the initial analytical decisions by labeling the data and the latter uses frequent and/or significant codes to, not only sort the data, but also to synthesize and conceptualize it (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

We began our analysis with a role-based perspective of followership in mind which influenced the initial coding. However, during the analysis process it became clear that a constructionist view would be more beneficial in addressing the research purpose. The reason for this is because it became evident that both followers and leaders adapted their role in the interaction depending on the other party's behavior. This meant that we had to go back to the original transcripts and adjust our codes which in turn changed the way in which we sorted the material. The new sorting gave rise to a couple of themes, namely different forms of influencing attempts and moderating factors of the willingness of followers to influence. We then proceeded to reduce the material to that which we found relevant in answering our research question and that exemplified the identified themes.

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011) highlight the importance of using the empirical data as support for your argumentation, rather than just presenting the results. To illustrate the

identified themes, quotes from the interviews are presented in the results chapter where we interpret the material as well as reflect on different perspectives through which the phenomena could be viewed. We had a continuous discussion around these interpretations to ensure a certain degree of objectivity and to avoid misrepresenting the statements made by the interviewees. During the analysis, we connected certain quotes in order to create cohesive arguments for the proposed themes as well as conceptualizing the observed social phenomena.

3.4 Limitations

Below we will discuss possible limitations of the methodology of this study as well as the steps taken in order to mitigate the effects of these limitations.

Firstly, the chosen method relies on participants' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences and perspectives accurately (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Additionally, participants may be reluctant to speak candidly about their experiences due to concerns about retribution or perceived power dynamics within the organization (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Despite this we will regard what is said during the interviews as an accurate representation of the participants' experiences. Secondly, because of access-related problems, we were only able to interview six people (two managers and four employees). Due to this, some perspectives may have potentially been excluded from this study which could be cause for concerns regarding the reliability of the study. Although more interviews would have been desirable, it is our opinion that we still managed to obtain rich and varied responses from the interviews. Thirdly, according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), semi-structured interviews may introduce bias in the data collection process. They argue that participants may be more likely to present themselves in a positive light or to be reluctant to speak candidly about their experiences due to social desirability bias or concerns about retribution. Finally, the study is reliant on our interpretation of the data, which introduces the potential for researcher bias (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). This could lead to certain valuable information being overlooked. Analogously, certain data could potentially be overemphasized when in reality, it is of less importance.

To mitigate these limitations, the interview questions were designed to be open-ended and non-judgmental, and the participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. We also aimed to establish rapport with the participants to help them feel more comfortable and at ease during the interview. Furthermore, we took a reflexive stance, acknowledging our own biases and preconceptions throughout the research process. We also sought to present a balanced and nuanced view of the findings, drawing on quotations from the transcripts to illustrate the themes identified. Additionally, we highlighted the limitations of the study and gave suggestions for further research to build on the findings and explore the phenomena in different contexts.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are an important aspect of any research study and must be carefully considered throughout the research process. In this study, several ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical and responsible manner.

Firstly, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the start of the interviews. Participants were provided with information about the study, its purpose, and the expected outcomes, and were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had. Furthermore, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that their names and any identifying information would not be used in any publications or reports. All data was stored securely and accessible only to the group members. Additionally, the study was conducted with respect for the participants' autonomy and dignity. We recognize the power dynamics that exist between leaders and followers, and therefore took measures to ensure that the participants felt comfortable taking part in our study. These measures include informing them of their anonymity as well as starting the interview in a relaxed way with short easy warm-up questions.

3.6 Quality of Qualitative Research

The study's credibility can be assessed based on the framework for quality assessment presented by Guba and Lincoln (1985, cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The framework consists of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In terms of credibility, which refers to the degree to which the research findings are accurate and trustworthy, several measures were taken to enhance the credibility of this study. First, we collected data from multiple sources, both leaders and followers, to validate the findings. We also engaged in prolonged immersion with the data, spending a significant amount of time analyzing the data and discussing the findings to ensure that they were grounded in the data. Ryan and Bernard (2003) argue that the validity of a study as “hinging on the agreement across [...] researchers” since by reaching consensus within the group can reduce the effects of bias. Through our discussions, we sought to be in consonance with each other in order to avoid infringing upon the credibility of the study.

In terms of transferability, which refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings, we provided a detailed description of the research setting, participants, and data collection methods to enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to their own contexts. The use of rich, detailed descriptions of the data and findings also enhances transferability by allowing readers to make their own judgments about the applicability of the findings.

In terms of dependability, which refers to the consistency and stability of the research findings over time, we used detailed documentation and a clear audit trail to ensure that the research process was transparent and replicable. The use of verbatim transcripts and detailed coding schemes also enhances dependability by enabling other researchers to replicate the analysis and validate the findings. But as Ryan and Bernard (2003) point out, there is no one correct interpretation of a particular set of data. However, by arguing for our interpretations in a clear and faithful manner, we aim to convince the reader of the study's validity.

Finally, regarding confirmability, which refers to the extent to which the findings are free from bias or the influence of the researchers' values and beliefs, we employed a reflexive

approach to data collection and analysis. This involved reflecting on our own biases and assumptions throughout the research process and acknowledging their potential influence on the findings. The use of peer-review and discussions within the group also enhances confirmability by providing an opportunity for external parties to challenge the findings and reaching intergroup agreement.

Overall, the framework presented by Guba and Lincoln (1985, cited in Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) provides a robust and comprehensive approach for evaluating the credibility of qualitative research studies. The measures taken in this study align with this framework, providing strong support for the credibility of the study.

4. Analysis

4.1 The Boundary of Influence

The co-construction of leadership is a result of the interaction between leader and follower. When a manager makes a decision, they are in a sense seeking to establish a boundary beyond which they do not want to be influenced. This decision-making moves the manager's boundary forward, limiting the influence of subordinates. Conversely, subordinates' willingness to pursue influencing attempts is their boundary, and when they encroach on the manager's boundary, it opens the possibility of influencing the manager. When subordinates try to influence managers they move their boundary forward. These imaginary boundaries are individual and dynamic, meaning that they are placed at different positions depending on the situation and issue at hand as well as the personal relationship between the two parties.

4.1.1 A Manager's Boundary

In this part of the chapter we aim to explore how the managers in the studied organization establish their boundaries and the extent to which they are influenced by their subordinates. One manager, when asked about what to do when followers disagree with a manager's decision after several suggestions from followers had been declined, answered as follows:

You have already listened and gotten an opinion from everyone so it is just a matter of summarizing everything and making the best decision given the available information. We can all be wrong but someone has to make a decision and if that's your responsibility you have to make it and live with the consequences. - Verstappen

Verstappen explains that managers have to consider all the input they receive and then make the final decision. This describes the process of how subordinates can affect the outcome through influencing attempts. However, not all influencing attempts can be successful and the manager, by making the final decision, cements their boundary. Upon asking the same question to another manager, we received a similar response.

It is always wise to be humble but you also have to consider if you get convinced that this is the right thing to do and then you just have to say that this is how it is. - Senna

Even though the importance of listening and being open-minded to followers is highlighted in the quote above, influencing the manager is dependent on the argument's credibility and persuasiveness. If subordinates fail to persuade the manager, the influencing attempt is unsuccessful and the manager's boundary remains in place. When asked how to deal with followers that oppose decisions, the managers explained:

Then you have to see if you can get proven wrong but it's like we usually say, that in a company there is just enough democracy. In the end you just have to say that this is how it is because I think so or that the management team think that this is the best. - Senna

You have been screaming and standing on the table and I hear you even better now but I still think that the other [option] is better. You have not convinced me so we will continue with that. - Verstappen

The two quotes above highlight the formal authority that managers have. At a certain point, the manager has to set a boundary for the possibility of being influenced. In this quote the boundary for the manager is when the argumentation ends. If a subordinate resorts to other methods to try and influence, they will meet the boundary that the manager has set. However, the managers at this company clearly state that their boundary is not necessarily predetermined and that they greatly value input from their employees. This is further exemplified when one manager was asked about their ideal employee:

I want employees that are efficient in several ways. Efficient by having the competencies that are required to complete the work that needs to be done. [...] They should be confrontational. [...] An employee who constantly just says yes I call consultants because consultants have to say yes. If you are to contribute to making something grow you need conflict. Most ideas, the best solutions are created when you have contact between plus and minus. That is how you get sparks. That is when stuff happens. - Verstappen

However, when asked how they would be impacted if everyone in the organization were the described ideal employee, the manager stated that they would be redundant:

In that case I would retire! I would not be needed anymore. It becomes self-sufficient and that is actually perfect. [...] If you get to that point where all your employees are gods or perfect, you are no longer needed. - Verstappen

The two aforementioned quotes show how the boundary that managers set depends on the composition of subordinates. If the subordinates are perfect, experts within their own area and self-driven, the manager is willing to let go of the reins and move their boundary as far back as possible. In spite of this, the same manager described the vital role of managers earlier in the interview:

I think that the organization, whether it's a company or a department or something else, the manager has the most important role for making things happen. - Verstappen

This contradicts the previous statements; if the manager has the most important role, how can they be unnecessary under the right circumstances? This contradiction highlights an important part in the process that managers have when setting a boundary for influence. The boundary is dependent on the subordinates – the quality of the subordinates affects where the manager sets their boundary.

Although those circumstances are not realistic, it does suggest that it is followers who have the most important role in driving an organization forward since managers are not needed when you have a team of ideal employees. This contradiction also indicates there being a delta between how the manager wants to see things and their actual perception of them. For example, their actual perception might be that managers are the most important but want to appear as though they listen and consider subordinates' opinions, like in the following quote.

It is very good that you can make decisions but it is much more important to make the right decisions. [...] You come into a meeting with one opinion and someone else has another opinion and then a conflict arises. But the result is that through this conflict, the solutions become better, I believe. - Verstappen

Thus, being open-minded at a meeting is considered a good thing and it is when a conflict arises that the best possible outcomes are reached.

Interviewing the managers revealed that there is a boundary that they set regarding how willing they are to be influenced by their subordinates. This boundary is not completely static and instead can vary. It is common that the interviewed managers are open to being influenced through new ideas and argumentation for these ideas. However, the managers also note that there is a clear boundary that they usually set. They need to make the final decision, and after a decision is made they are not open to influence attempts.

4.1.2 A Subordinate's Boundary

Even though Verstappen highlighted the importance of managers' role, they also emphasized that it is not only about making decisions, but to make the right decisions, stating that "... through this conflict, the solutions become better". At this company, subordinates are afforded the opportunity to voice their opinions and participate in the construction of leadership. By expressing their opinions and suggestions in the continuous interaction with managers, subordinates are able to push their boundary of influence forwards.

We have a constant dialogue about solutions to things. - Schumacher

The fact that both leaders and followers experience that there exists a dialogue between the two groups suggests that it does indeed occur. Even if managers claim to seek better solutions through discussions and conflicts with employees, it might be a sign of communication issues if the employees do not share that perception. Although that does not seem to be the case in this company. Furthermore, since there is a constant dialogue to find solutions it shows that subordinates are willing to discuss with managers. As a result of these discussions subordinates influence the outcome. This shows that this subordinate has set a boundary that lets them influence outcomes through dialogue.

As mentioned above, there are several ways in which followers handle disagreements with a manager's decision which is also illustrated below:

It does happen that I have my opinion and that everyone else has different opinions but if [the manager] has decided something, I feel that it is better that we all agree and try it out instead of trying to run over the team. - Lauda

In this scenario, a follower suggests that even though there might be disagreements within the work group, the most important thing is to stick together. In this scenario, the follower moves their boundary of influence forward by voicing their opinion but after the manager makes a decision, the follower then retracts their boundary and works together with the team. When asked about how a subordinate acts when disagreeing with a manager, one employee responded:

It depends on how important it is to take that battle but more often than not I say, okay then, and then we do it that way but we might have had a discussion before about it. - Schumacher

This suggests that the follower's boundary might move depending on how important the question is to them. As it becomes more important, the boundary also moves forward. When elaborating further on the previous question, picturing a situation where the follower strongly disagrees, they would go about it in another way:

Then I would say "in my opinion we shouldn't do it this way" but it is ultimately up to them to make the decision. - Schumacher

This quote highlights that employees are not afraid of challenging the views of their superiors, but once the decision is made, they tend to follow that decision without much resistance. Furthermore, followers do not feel that it is worth starting a conflict but are content with just contributing with their perspective and feeling listened to.

If [manager] thinks something else then we should try that since I am still getting the opportunity to show them what I do and that we are working in the right direction - Lauda

In this instance, the employee is willing to adjust their boundary of influence in favor of supporting their manager such that once the manager establishes their boundary, the employee withdraws theirs in order to avoid further conflict. Another way to avoid conflict is to be conservative with your boundary-setting from the start as to not cross the manager's.

I don't like conflicts, so I am careful about not doing things that might lead to a conflict. - Prost

The quote suggests that the boundaries of followers are very individual, while some followers have described that they are inclined to create conflicts or disagreements while, as indicated in the quote above, some followers are keen on avoiding conflicts. As a result of the conflict avoidance they limit their own ability to influence their manager.

Our interviews with the subordinates indicate that the setting of a boundary regarding their willingness to influence leaders is not static. Instead it is situational and affected by the decision that a manager has made, the situation and perceived importance by subordinates as well as the personalities of the subordinates themselves. If a manager has already made a decision, subordinates will often set a boundary that limits their ability for continued influence attempts. However, if subordinates perceive that a decision is important to them, they are open to move this boundary to try and continue their influence attempt. This begs the question; how do they move this boundary?

4.2 Moving the Boundary

In the previous chapter we presented how both managers and subordinates set boundaries that moderate influence. Managers create a boundary that represents their willingness to be influenced. Subordinates, on the other hand, create a boundary that limits how far they are willing to go in order to influence their manager. We found that this boundary is not static and instead depends on the situation and the individual that sets the boundary. Since these boundaries are not static they can be moved. In the upcoming chapter we will present how subordinates act in order to move their, as well as their manager's, boundary of influence.

4.2.1 Influence Through Enabling and Disabling Behavior

In order to influence their leaders, followers often rely on cooperation. Many followers act in ways that promote other followers' influence on leaders. This could be described as enabling behavior where followers enable each other to influence a leader. However, enabling behavior is opposed by disabling behavior; behaviors that limit followers' ability to influence leaders. In this part of the analysis we will argue for the existence of both of these behaviors.

When asked a question regarding listening to other followers, one interviewed follower describes how they try to take a step back to allow for other followers to be heard.

Both me and my manager talk a lot while [others] do not talk as much. Therefore I said “please tell me your thoughts and I will help you by taking a step back”. If two people talk, me being one of them ... then I might be the one who gets heard first but instead I say “ what did you say?”. So to take a step back but also if someone else gets to speak first, to listen to them and help them so you get to hear everyone’s smart opinions so you avoid that the ones who scream the loudest are the only ones who are able to speak up. - Schumacher

The quote above describes how the follower in question acts to help others express themselves in an organizational context. In this case, it is done by taking a step back and inviting others into the conversation to include additional perspectives. Allowing for more follower voices to be heard could be seen as enabling behavior. Through enabling behavior, subordinates strengthen their boundaries and consequently their influence over their manager. The way that Schumacher takes a step back results in other followers having the possibility to influence a leader. Behavior such as this is supported by other followers.

I do think that by discussing and by letting ideas pop up ... and allow all voices [to be heard] it can be very inspirational and very fruitful. - Hamilton

Once again, a follower believes that better results can be achieved with input from more followers. Furthermore, this diversity of ideas is achieved by “allowing all voices” which indicates enabling behavior – it is by enabling these voices to be heard that better results are achieved. Enabling behavior can also be conducted by followers to help improve their own ability to influence leaders.

... we said that we would come up with some new numbers some time next week but this wasn’t that important. But then I said that I thought that this would be interesting so I would gladly look into it and then [they] said go ahead and make an estimate based on what you think. - Lauda

Lauda describes how they took the initiative to present some new numbers that otherwise would have been postponed and decided upon later. However, by taking the initiative, Lauda

makes it possible for a decision to be taken sooner. In a sense, by taking the initiative and presenting these numbers, Lauda enables themselves to influence the decisions that the leader takes since they control what numbers are presented. Furthermore, by being proactive, the follower sets their boundary first, forcing the manager to react which might result in the manager ceding influence to the subordinate by withdrawing their boundary. By allowing for followers to take the initiative, leaders enable followers by giving them more autonomy. In other words, managers can play an important role in moving forward subordinates' boundaries of influence.

In the interviews that we conducted with managers at our study object we also identified how these managers enable followers to impact the decisions that are made.

When working with extroverts it is easier because they are straightforward, but the information is not as rich if you don't also try to work with an introvert. Extroverts usually speak up even if it is not important, then you have to filter what is important and unimportant. An introvert thinks a lot and then you get exactly what is really important. But you have to make an extra effort to get it out of them. - Verstappen

This manager believes that everyone can have valuable opinions but you have to approach followers differently in regards to their personality. Verstappen highlights the need to put in an extra effort to access the thoughts of an introvert. These thoughts in turn can influence the future decisions that the manager takes. This extra effort that the managers put in to reach the ideas of introverts could be seen as enabling behavior. With this effort, Verstappen enables the introverted subordinate to influence the decisions that they as a leader take. By enabling the subordinate the manager helps them move their boundary of influence forward. The other manager, Senna, explains their leadership style which also aligns with the enabling behavior identified in the quote by Verstappen.

I would say that I am pretty delegating, trying to be integrating and open as a manager and human being. So, open leadership, trying to be very clear and delegating but still be a part in the process. [...] Throw the child in the water and see how well they swim. - Senna

Senna is here describing their leadership style as delegating, integrating and open. Connecting this with what Verstappen said, this could also be seen as enabling behavior since

Senna is inclusive towards their followers and is open-minded. Even though Senna is delegating, they also emphasize that the leadership style is about giving the followers a chance to influence how they conduct their work. This enables the subordinates to influence Senna because of Senna's openness and the autonomy that is given to the subordinates.

The cooperative enabling behavior among followers and leaders as well as the self-enabling behavior that followers engage in increase followers' potential for influence. However, there are also behaviors that decrease this potential. Throughout the conducted interviews, followers exhibited behaviors that resulted in a decrease of their ability to influence. We choose to call these behaviors *disabling behaviors*. In the quote below we can see how one follower exhibiting self-disabling behavior because of self-doubt.

It's hard for me to speak up when I don't feel fine. I always tend to explain [it as] I am the person who is thinking wrongly so I keep that for me [sic]. - Hamilton

This follower invalidates their own thoughts and through this, their ability to influence. In turn, this inhibits them from voicing their concerns. When followers question their own understanding and invalidate their own thoughts they limit their possibility to influence leaders by pulling back their own boundary. They have a behavior that could be viewed as self-disabling since they disable themselves by invalidating their thoughts. This self-disabling behavior is supported by another follower.

I don't like conflicts, so I am careful about not doing things that might lead to a conflict. - Prost

Prost presents that they dislike conflicts. Furthermore, Prost also perceives that their dislike of conflicts impacts what they do and question in order not to provoke a conflict. By being careful with what they do in order to avoid conflicts, Prost inhibits their own ability to influence their leader. In addition to self-disabling behavior, followers' ability to influence leaders can also be disabled by leaders or other followers. Below, one follower expresses how they perceive that their ability to affect leaders has decreased and how this affects them as a follower.

Potentially yes, but at the same time it feels like I have lost [influence]. Before, when we were colleagues and we had another manager ... who didn't have the same research background, I often participated in board meetings and presented some data but ever since they took over, they have that under control so I have probably lost some connection with [redacted] because [current manager] has expertise in those areas that [the previous manager] didn't. -

Schumacher

Schumacher highlights how they previously played a vital role in helping their leader understand the complicated research processes that the company in question works with. However, Schumacher also describes how they have been forced to take a step back since their new manager has the expertise that is required to understand these processes. In a sense, Schumacher believes that they have lost influence over the information that their leader receives and their power to influence the leader has decreased. This situation differs from the previous occasions of disabling behavior that we have presented. Previously, disabling behavior has been enacted by followers onto themselves. However, in this situation the disabling act was outside of Schumacher's control. This indicates that there exists a disabling behavior that followers cannot influence which changes the scope of boundary-setting. Disabling behavior could take place during management changes in which the relationship between a follower and leader resets. However, it could also be because of the knowledge the new manager possesses. If the follower does not have complementary knowledge to a manager, it affects the ability of influencing a manager negatively. To counteract this disabling behavior that was enacted upon Schumacher they in turn react with self-enabling behavior.

That is also something I will bring up during the next meeting because it doesn't feel very nice since they don't really know what I do and my capacity and what I can be used for. That is something that you lose when you don't have regular contact and don't participate in the weekly meetings. - Schumacher

Since Schumacher feels that the ability to influence their leader has decreased, they have decided to bring this up during an upcoming meeting with the hope of receiving more responsibility and recognition. This increase in possibility could potentially lead to a larger possibility to influence leadership. Lifting these concerns that Schumacher has, could be seen as self-enabling behavior since they act to increase their impact on leadership and decisions

that are taken. Furthermore, Schumacher also acts in a way that moves their boundary forward, closer to their manager's boundary. In addition to the disabling behaviors and acts previously presented we can also see further examples of disabling behavior.

Sometimes [a colleague] presents numbers that are a bit too positive. They sound a bit too good and then I try to put them into perspective instead of lowering them. The numbers become a bit more realistic and I believe that my manager can appreciate this perspective and the work I do. I make sure that [my manager] receives the information that they need to make decisions. - Lauda

In the quote above, Lauda presents how they try to put the information that their colleague presents into perspective in order to help their manager to make decisions. One could say that by questioning the numbers that their colleague presents, Lauda limits the ability for this follower to influence their leader. This indicates that similarly to the cooperative enabling behavior that we previously presented, disabling behavior can be enacted upon other followers to limit their ability to influence leaders. This type of disabling behavior also indicates that subordinates can impact the boundary setting of other subordinates. However, the disabling behavior enacted upon others is not as prominent as the enabling behavior within this organization.

Through the use of enabling and disabling behavior, followers can move their boundary of influence forwards and backwards respectively. Enabling behavior consists of actively voicing one's opinion or coming with suggestions, proactively taking initiative, and enabling others to influence and thus have a greater effect on leadership and decisions that are taken. This is often done by allowing for more voices to be heard. Leaders can also engage in these behaviors in the way that they approach different followers and how they handle opposing viewpoints. Structural changes can also contribute to increasing or decreasing followers' ability to influence by changing the circumstances in which the leader-follower interaction takes place.

4.2.2 Influence Through Resources

Another way for subordinates to exercise influence is to be in possession of resources demanded by leaders. In the context of the studied company, these resources chiefly consist

of information, competence or other kinds of expertise. Information, aside from the traditional definition, can also be viewed as the thoughts and ideas of organizational members. It is with these definitions that we will take a closer look at how followers can leverage resources to move their boundaries, and also how leaders depend on these resources to make decisions.

In the following quote, a follower describes a potential problem with their current manager but also explains how they go about solving the problem.

But it's not always that you get a yes or no in that case either, but then I think that it is up to me to decide and I do what I think is best. - Prost

The manager in this instance allows the employee to tackle an issue in a way that they deem appropriate. Given this freedom, the employee can in turn influence their own work process without interference from management. Furthermore, another follower describes the open-mindedness of their manager which also leads to the manager enabling the follower to influence.

But I do know that he would be open to discuss anything that is needed if I need that. - Hamilton

This quote suggests that employees at this company feel like they are being listened to. The managers are “open to discuss anything” which can be interpreted as them being willing to be influenced. In this way the starting point for the manager's boundary is withdrawn because they are open minded and willing to discuss with their subordinates. When the manager's boundary is withdrawn subordinates can in turn move their own boundary forward if they have something to discuss. This sentiment is also echoed by other employees that were interviewed, for example the following quote.

If I see something that I think is inefficient I will take a closer look at that and then suggest improvements before it becomes a problem. - Luda

Here, the employee showcases proactive behavior when they discover possibilities for improvement. The quote further exemplifies that employees of this company believe that they

have the ability to influence because without that belief they would not actively contribute with suggestions. Attempts to influence are not only limited to proactive instances, they also occur as a response to disagreement. The following employee describes the process of trying to persuade their manager.

Yes I always do that if I am against something. Providing advantages and disadvantages and trying to argue my case. That is something that I also do in other circumstances when we have to get along. Then I present any potential scenarios and try to reason around that, which I also do with my manager because she is definitely not unreasonable. - Schumacher

A useful way to influence managers is to provide different scenarios with connected advantages and disadvantages in order for the managers to have an overview in a realistic way. Showcasing different scenarios also affects managers since it gives several nuances to what could happen if the idea is implemented. By providing scenarios with several advantages and disadvantages, the boundary of a manager is withdrawn since credible information is received which also affects the followers ability to influence. What was also asked, was whether the follower experiences that some followers are more driving than others, which in turn could lead to any additional power of affecting a manager:

I would say that everyone is pretty driving within their areas, [redacted] has a crazy amount of experience [...] and is very good and his role is to be driving within that. It is therefore positive to have those who can take the biggest decisions and push into certain directions even though I also like to affect others. But it is about doing it together with different ideas, I would never try and turn this organization around on my own. - Lauda

Because managers are more inclined to follow the recommendations from the followers with knowledge within a certain area, having driven and knowledgeable co-workers can strengthen the influence you have over managers. Managers appear to be more willing to withdraw their barrier if the subordinate possesses some kind of expertise.

Controlling resources such as information, expertise and experience, as well as knowing how to present these, improves subordinates' ability to influence managers. When this is the case, managers tend to place their boundary in a retracted state, leaving the possibility to be influenced open. The control of these resources amplifies the arguments and opinions of

subordinates which moves their boundary of influence forward. Therefore, the control of resources has an impact on both the boundaries that managers set as well as the advancement of followers' boundaries.

4.3 Summary

Leadership can be viewed as being co-constructed by leaders and followers through the establishment and movement of their respective boundaries of influence. Managers' boundaries represent their willingness to be influenced while followers' boundaries are their willingness to pursue influencing attempts. These imaginary boundaries are individual and dynamic, meaning that they are placed at different positions depending on the situation and issue at hand. The extent to which followers can influence leaders is decided by these boundaries. Follower influence is not static, it ebbs and flows and changes as a result of follower behaviors. These behaviors can be categorized as enabling or disabling based on the outcome they have on followers' ability to influence and can be enacted upon oneself or other followers. Enabling behaviors are behaviors that move a follower's boundary forward, thus increasing their ability to influence others while disabling behaviors, conversely, causes the boundary to recede. Furthermore, by being in possession of resources, followers can empower their boundaries, increasing their ability to influence.

5. Discussion

5.1 The struggle for power in organizations

In our study we identified a number of different behaviors that we classified as either enabling or disabling. These are behaviors that increase or decrease the ability that followers have of influencing their leader. As presented in the previous chapter, these behaviors can take a variety of forms and be enacted by both followers and leaders. We found that enabling and disabling behaviors can both be enacted upon oneself, as self-enabling and self-disabling, but also upon others by both managers and subordinates. In this part of the discussion we aim to present these behaviors and their relation to the already existing research on follower behaviors as well as linking them to the boundaries of influence that both followers and leaders enact.

One example of these behaviors is what we call self-enabling behavior. This often takes the form of the proactive behaviors presented by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) such as influence tactics, taking charge behavior and voice, but also as a form of constructive resistance where they disagree with management's decision in order to improve it. The aim of self-enabling behavior is to move your boundary of influence forward and thus increasing your ability to influence managers. Although self-enabling behavior is used to increase one's own influence, it is important to keep in mind that this takes place in the interaction between follower and leader. Since self-enabling is an expansion of a follower's boundary that might encroach on the leader's boundary, the leader must take a stance in regards to the follower's influencing attempt. Although the interviewed leaders at the studied R&D company emphasized the importance of follower influence, Whiting et al. (2012) as well as Grant, Parker and Collins (2009) postulate that proactive behavior from followers is not always welcomed by leaders. They can choose to stand their ground by not moving their boundary, which would result in a conflict between the follower and leader. Depending on the relationship between the leader and follower, this conflict could either lead to a fruitful discussion or to the leader moving their boundary forward, limiting the efficacy of future influencing attempts. Alternatively, the leader can withdraw their own boundary, allowing for a change in direction of leadership where the follower plays a more important role. This is an example of the iterative, reciprocal process of the co-construction of leadership described by the constructionist perspective of followership.

Contrary to the self-enabling behavior we also argue for the existence of self-disabling behavior, behaviors that followers enact upon themselves to decrease their ability to influence leaders. These behaviors are often characterized by not speaking up to avoid conflicts or because of the fear of being wrong. In some sense, self-disabling behavior correlates with behaviors associated with subordination and obedience since followers do not try to influence a leader. When followers are being subordinate and obedient by avoiding conflict they retract their boundaries, allowing themselves to be influenced. If we view this behavior in terms of claiming and granting processes as described by DeRue & Ashford (2010), one could argue that the follower, through self-disabling behavior, claims the role of a follower. Furthermore, this self-disabling and withdrawing of follower boundaries allows for leaders to move their boundary forward, changing the manifestation of leadership. Similarly to the leadership reactions to self-enabling behaviors, this potential reaction from leaders implies that the creation of leadership is a reciprocal social process. A process that is dependent on both parties in the leader-follower relationship.

Enabling and disabling behavior is not only an individual pursuit, it can also be enacted towards other followers. This means that a follower can behave in a way that either increases or decreases another follower's ability to influence a leader. Enabling behaviors enacted upon others can increase their ability to influence by encouraging them to move their boundary forward. On the other hand, disabling enacted upon others forces their boundary of influence backwards. This type of interpersonal enabling and disabling serves as an extension of the self-enabling and self-disabling behaviors discussed earlier. By involving the interplay among followers, we consider the dynamics of the group and its effects on their ability to influence leaders which is of particular importance in an organizational context since employees rarely work completely independently and typically outnumber managers.

5.2 The Power of Resources

As presented in the analysis, followers at the studied company perceive that control over resources such as experience and expertise improves their ability to influence leaders. By possessing resources that one's leader lacks, follower influence increases through leaders bestowing a leader role upon them more frequently. Additionally, if a leader acknowledges

their ignorance in a matter in which a follower exhibits expertise that the leader is highly dependent on, the possibility for the follower to influence ought to be regarded as substantial.

The power of resources can be used in a proactive manner as an influence tactic in order to persuade a leader about an issue. It can also be used reactively as a way to supply resistance with credibility. In both cases the possession of resources increases the follower's ability to influence. Furthermore, by having expertise in an area, the follower's confidence in their own voice is typically higher which could potentially make them feel stronger about the issue, thus increasing their willingness to engage in influencing attempts.

5.3 Crossing the Boundary

In our analysis we observed what can be described as a boundary of influence. For followers this means the limit to which you are willing to pursue an influencing attempt, whereas for leaders it describes the willingness of the leader to be influenced. These boundaries are not static; the dynamic nature of them can be viewed in terms of enabling and disabling behaviors. To illustrate this concept, it can partly be described in terms of DeRue and Ashfords (2010) claiming and granting process.

When a manager grants a subordinate a leader role, they withdraw their boundary and allow themselves to be influenced by the subordinate. In this way the manager enables the subordinate to influence them. Similarly, when a subordinate self-disables they claim a follower role, limiting their influence. DeRue and Ashfords (2010) claiming and granting process can also be applied to interpersonal enabling and disabling. However, unlike self-enabling and self-disabling the claiming and granting process involves at least two subordinates. When a subordinate interpersonally enables another subordinate, by for example inviting them to the discussion, they grant this subordinate a leader role. However, through interpersonal disabling, a subordinate moves another's boundary in order to limit their influence over the manager. In this case the construction of leadership is divided not only between manager and subordinate, but also among the subordinates. DeRue and Ashford (2010) claim that the roles bestowed upon an individual must be recognized by others to be consolidated, meaning that if one party claims a leader role, the other party must also grant

them that role for it to realize. Crossing the boundary describes the situation when that is not the case; when both parties claim leader roles.

When an employee lays claim to a leader role, they move past the manager's boundary. It is when the two boundaries cross each other that conflict arises. However, when a follower engages in proactive behavior, the leader can choose to cede and go along with the follower's suggestion or to push back, crossing the follower's boundary further. Our data indicates that both managers and subordinates value the conflict that occurs when boundaries cross. They suggest that it is through this conflict that the organization is able to move forward and interesting ideas come to light. Furthermore, our findings suggest that whether a subordinate then adjusts their boundary so as to no longer cross the leader's or stands their ground, prolonging the conflict, is dependent on how important the issue is for them. Group dynamics also play into the degree of willingness to pursue a certain issue. We found that employees tend to value consensus within the group over pursuing what they think is the "correct" option. Followers hence move their boundary by engaging in enabling and disabling behaviors.

The concept of boundaries of influence contributes a new perspective to view leader-follower interactions. Strictly viewing this interaction as claiming and granting processes (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) limits our understanding of the role that conflict plays in this relationship because of the binary roles of follower and leader. Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien's (2014) discursive approach accounts for this relational component – suggesting that leadership is co-constructed through leader-follower interaction. However, Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien's (2014) approach focuses on the way organizational members talk about the leader and follower roles that they possess and the impact that this discourse has on the co-construction of leadership. Our findings, on the other hand, focuses on the behaviors that organizational members have and how these behaviors affect the co-construction of leadership. The concept of influence boundaries views leadership as being co-constructed by followers and leaders and that it is determined by the degree to which they are able to influence each other. In contrast to DeRue and Ashford (2010) where the relationship is binary, this perspective describes the spectrum that exists in between leader and follower as well as the back and forth found in their interactions.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Findings

This study aimed to answer the question; *How do followers and leaders co-construct leadership?* Through interviews conducted at an R&D company we can conclude that leaders and followers can co-construct leadership in different ways. Firstly, we conceptualized the follower-leader interaction from which leadership is co-constructed as boundaries of influence. These boundaries are moveable and vary between individuals and context. Secondly, we identified that followers behave in various ways to either increase or decrease their own or other followers' influence on leaders by moving their boundaries. This can for example be achieved by cooperation to increase influence or conflict avoidance to decrease influence. Finally, we also identified that control of resources such as expertise and experience play a vital role in subordinates' ability to influence managers, especially those that lack the resource in question.

With this study we have investigated how leaders and followers co-construct leadership. As a result we have identified two different categories of behaviors, enabling and disabling, that can either be enacted upon others or upon a follower themselves. Although these behaviors are similar to the follower behaviors presented in earlier research, they help us illustrate how follower boundaries can be moved. Furthermore, we also identified how followers engage in enabling and disabling behaviors in order to impact leaders by moving their influence boundaries. The identification of the two behavioral categories, enabling and disabling, as well as their effect on the leader-follower relationship through the setting and movement of boundaries contributes to existing literature on follower behaviors as well as the constructionist view on followership.

The main finding of our study is the so-called boundary of influence. For followers, this boundary describes the extent to which followers are willing to pursue an influencing attempt. For leaders, it is about their willingness to be influenced by followers. However these boundaries are dynamic and participants move them forward and backwards through enabling and disabling behavior. When the boundaries cross, conflict arises. The dependent factors of the boundaries are the importance of the issue for the follower as well as the degree

of influence for an individual or followers as a group. This concept provides a new dimension to look at the co-construction of leadership in the constructionist perspective of followership.

6.2 The Problems

Although producing interesting and rich results, our study has a couple of limitations affecting it. We believe that by only interviewing four followers and two leaders, there could exist patterns and discourse regarding follower influence and co-construction of leadership that have been missed. With a larger sample of interviews it is possible that other interesting patterns that either support or discredit our findings might have been found. Furthermore, since we only conducted interviews and not observations, it could mean that we have missed some important information. With observations, we would have been able to see real life interactions and how each individual acts and reacts to certain situations. However, with interviews, perceptions were the main source of information and we had to assume that the statements made by the interviewees were veracious. This is a limitation since there could exist a discrepancy between the perceptions and the actual actions from the followers in how they influence their leaders and the impact that this influence has on the co-construction of leadership. Regardless, we believe that based on the collected data, our interpretations help deepen the understanding of followership.

Further limitation with our findings and our study is how it has been limited to one type of organization. We conducted our study by interviewing organizational members at an R&D company with a rather flat hierarchy. Since our study was conducted at such a niche company it is not possible to say that the same occurrences that we have identified would also be found at other organizations with other preconditions. As a result of this our results might be dependent on this culture. Therefore, it is also not a guarantee that the same results will be achieved in a company or country with a different culture.

6.3 The Future

In spite of the limitations of the study, our findings can still have practical relevance for both followers and leaders. The awareness of enabling and disabling behavior can help managers and leaders to understand how they are being influenced by their followers. Furthermore,

understanding the mechanisms behind the co-construction of leadership can help leaders interact with followers in a more productive manner. However, should the leader be acting in malice, it is possible to limit the influence of followers. Followers are also able to learn from this study since they will be able to know how to influence their leaders efficiently.

Therefore, followers will be more likely to be successful in influencing their leaders but also be aware of what behaviors that usually limit their ability to influence their leaders are. Our findings also have organizational implications. If leaders and followers use the knowledge of our findings, it could impact organizational efficiency. The knowledge of crossing the boundary could help promote positive conflict that leads to organizational improvement as a result of the conflicts that arise.

This study brings a new and interesting perspective to followership behaviors as well as contributing to the understanding of the co-construction of leadership through the concept of boundaries of influence. As a result of this, new questions arise that we believe indicate interesting directions for future research on followership. We believe that the actual effect that our findings have on organizational outcomes needs to be studied. When a situation where crossing the boundary occurs, what are the actual effects on the organization? Furthermore, what are the long-term effects on the personal relationship between leader and follower when followers enact enabling and disabling behavior? What happens when a leader repeatedly cedes influence to a follower? Furthermore, to discern whether our findings are one time occurrences limited to our studied company or more general findings, similar studies should be conducted on other organizations with different circumstances. By conducting future research in the aforementioned directions we can better understand both leadership and followership as well as the dependent relationship between the two -ships.

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