

# The Leadership Process

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn to recognize the processes associated with people coming to leadership positions. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Leadership Process
2. Components of the Leadership Process
  - 2a. The Leader
  - 2b. The Follower
  - 2c. The Context
  - 2d. The Process
  - 2e. The Consequences

## 1. The Leadership Process

Leadership is a process, a complex and dynamic exchange relationship built over time between leader and follower and between leader and the group of followers who depend on each other to attain a mutually desired goal (Hollander & Julian, 1969). There are several key components to this “working relationship”: the leader, the followers, the context (situation), the leadership process per se, and the consequences (outcomes) (Stogdill, 1948). Across time, each component interacts with and influences the other components, and whatever consequences (such as leader-follower trust) are created influence future interactions. As any one of the components changes, so too will leadership (Murphy, 1941).

## 2. Components of the Leadership Process

### 2a. The Leader

Leaders are people who take charge of or guide the activities of others. They are often seen as the focus or orchestrator of group activity, the people who set the tone of the group so that it can move forward to attain its goals. Leaders provide the group with what is required to fulfill its maintenance and task needs.



Later in the challenge, we will return to the “leader as a person” as part of our discussion of the trait approach to leadership.

## 2b. The Follower

The follower is not a passive player in the leadership process. Edwin Hollander, after many years of studying leadership, suggested that the follower is the most critical factor in any leadership event (Hollander, 1964). It is, after all, the follower who perceives the situation and comes to define the needs that the leader must fulfill. In addition, it is the follower who either rejects leadership or accepts acts of leadership by surrendering his or her power to the leader to diminish task uncertainty, to define and manage the meaning of the situation to the follower, and to orchestrate the follower’s action in pursuit of goal attainment.

The follower’s personality and readiness to follow determine the style of leadership that will be most effective. For example, individuals with an internal locus of control are much more responsive to participative styles of leadership than individuals with an external locus of control (House & Mitchell, 1974). Individuals with an authoritarian personality are highly receptive to the effectiveness of directive acts of leadership (Yuki, 1971). It is the followers’ expectations, as well as their performance-based needs, that determine what a leader must do in order to be effective.

The strength of the follower’s self-concept has also been linked to the leadership process. High-self-esteem individuals tend to have a strong sense of self-efficacy, that is, a generalized belief they can be successful in difficult situations. They therefore tend to be strongly motivated to perform and persist in the face of adversity (Gardner & Pierce, 1998). The high-self-esteem follower tends to be responsive to participative styles of leadership. Low-self-esteem individuals, who doubt their competence and worthiness and their ability to succeed in difficult situations, function better with supportive forms of leadership. This helps them deal with the stress, frustration, and anxiety that often emerge with difficult tasks. Followers without a readiness to follow, limited by their inability to perform and lack of motivation and commitment, usually need more directive forms of leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1998).

Follower behavior plays a major role in determining what behaviors leaders engage in.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Followers who perform at high levels tend to cause their leaders to be considerate in their treatment and to play a less directive role. Followers who are poor performers, on the other hand, tend to cause their leaders to be less warm toward them and to be more directive and controlling in their leadership style (Greene, 1975).

## 2c. The Context

Situations make demands on a group and its members, and not all situations are the same. Context refers to the situation that surrounds the leader and the followers. Situations are multidimensional. We discuss the context as it pertains to leadership in greater detail later in this challenge, but for now let’s look at it in terms of the task and task environment that confront the group.

- Is the task structured or unstructured?
- Are the goals of the group clear or ambiguous?

- Is there agreement or disagreement about goals?
- Is there a body of knowledge that can guide task performance?
- Is the task boring or frustrating?
- Is the task intrinsically satisfying?
- Is the environment complex or simple, stable or unstable?

These factors create different contexts within which leadership unfolds, and each factor places a different set of needs and demands on the leader and on the followers.

The leadership context for the leader of a group of assembly line production workers differs from the context for the leader of a self-managing production team and from the context confronted by the lead scientists in a research laboratory. The leadership tactics that work in the first context might fail miserably in the latter two.

## 2d. The Process

The process of leadership is separate and distinct from the leader (the person who occupies a central role in the group). The process is a complex, interactive, and dynamic working relationship between leader and followers. This working relationship, built over time, is directed toward fulfilling the group's maintenance and task needs. Part of the process consists of an exchange relationship between the leader and follower. The leader provides a resource directed toward fulfilling the group's needs, and the group gives compliance, recognition, and esteem to the leader. To the extent that leadership is the exercise of influence, part of the leadership process is captured by the surrender of power by the followers and the exercise of influence over the followers by the leader (Hollander & Julian, 1969). Thus, the leader influences the followers and the followers influence the leader, the context influences the leader and the followers, and both leader and followers influence the context.

## 2e. The Consequences

A number of outcomes or consequences of the leadership process unfold between leader, follower, and situation. At the group level, two outcomes are important:

- *Have the group's maintenance needs been fulfilled?* That is, do members of the group like and get along with one another, do they have a shared set of norms and values, and have they developed a good working relationship? Have individuals' needs been fulfilled as reflected in attendance, motivation, performance, satisfaction, citizenship, trust, and maintenance of the group membership?
- *Have the group's task needs been met?* There are important consequences of the leadership process for individuals: attendance, motivation, performance, satisfaction, citizenship, trust, and maintenance of their group membership.

The **leader-member exchange (LMX) theory** of leadership highlights consequences associated with the leadership process. The theory views leadership as relationship-based with a focus on the two-way, or **dyadic**, link between a leader and a follower. A leader-follower relationship tends to develop quickly and remains relatively stable over time. The quality of the relationship is reflected by the degree of mutual trust, loyalty, support, respect, and obligation. High- and low-quality relationships between a leader and each of his or her followers produce in-groups and out-groups among the followers. Members of the in-group come to be key

players, and high-quality exchange relationships tend to be associated with higher levels of performance, commitment, and satisfaction than are low-quality exchange relationships (Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). Attitudinal similarity and extroversion appear to be associated with a high-quality leader-member relationship (Schriesheim et al., 2000).



#### KEY CONCEPT

The nature of the leadership process varies substantially depending on the leader, the followers, and the situation and context. Thus, leadership is the function of an interaction between the leader, the follower, and the context.



#### REFLECT

What are the components of the process associated with people coming to leadership positions?



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Leader-member Exchange (LMX) Theory

A relationship-based leadership theory with a focus on the two-way link between a leader and a follower.

##### Dyadic

A group of two.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the processes associated with people coming to leadership positions. You learned that the **process of leadership** is a complex and dynamic exchange relationship built over time between leader and followers who depend on each other to attain a mutually desired goal. You also learned that there are several key **components of the leadership process: the leader, the follower, the context, the process, and the consequences**, noting that as any one of the components changes, so too will leadership. Thus, leadership is the function of an interaction between the leader, the follower, and the context. Ultimately, at the group level, two outcomes are important—whether or not the group's maintenance needs and task needs have been met. Lastly, you learned about the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership, which views leadership as relationship-based with a focus on the two-way, or dyadic, link between a leader and a follower.

Best of luck in your learning!

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### Dyadic

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