

# The Role of Leader Sociability on Follower Functionality: Literature Review

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**Abstract:** Relationships between the leader and the follower are crucial in meeting organizational objectives. The efforts of both the leader and the follower are of paramount importance. However, heavy responsibility is placed on the leader for organizational success and follower mobilization. Interpersonal relationships are the vehicle through which it becomes possible for follower functionality to test its best form. Follower functionality refers to the ability of followers to discharge their duties. It has been established that the sociability trait, through the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) framework, enhances the social capital necessary for the delivery of organizational objectives. Such an environment tills the workspace for follower expression and functionality. While sociability is mainly hereditary, leaders can foster it by developing basic disciplines and exercises like intentionally connecting with followers, walking around, promoting teamwork and utilizing humor. The leader's sociability may increase motivation and creativity levels, productivity, freedom of expression and reduce stress for the followers. Leader sociability is presented as one of the ways to improve follower functionality.

**Keywords:** *LMX Theory, leadership, follower functionality, sociability.*

improve follower functionality. Therefore, the role of leadership sociability on follower functionality brings to the forefront, the quality relationship between the leader and the follower. Results come through people. They play an essential role in achieving the objectives of the organization. Northouse (2019) identifies sociability as one of the leadership traits that enhance social capital. He defines it as "A leader's inclination to seek out pleasant social relationships" (p. 73). Mellor, Golay, and Tuller (2012, p. 131) define sociability trait as "a striving need, or preference to be in proximity to others, seeking and maintaining contact, interaction, coordination, and patterns of connection (i.e., being close and staying close to others)." They relate sociability with temperament. Gasman et al. (2002) opine that sociability appears early in the development of a human being and is considered to be a highly stable and heritable temperament trait. However, it can also be developed over time.

Sociable leaders are friendly, gregarious, courteous, tactful, diplomatic (Northouse, 2019) and spend quality time with people (Dhaundiyal & Coughlan, 2016). It is not surprising that such leaders display interpersonal skills and foster cooperative relationships with followers. Various scholars and researchers have concluded that leaders affect their followers with their personality traits (Judge et al., 2009; Kaiser & Hogan, 2010). Hoch and Dulebohn (2017), Sharma and Kirkman (2015), and De Vries (2012) have joined the fray of researchers who debate how the personality of leaders impacts followership functionality in pursuit of organizational goals and objectives. Figure 1 below presents the conceptual framework of the leader sociability determining follower functionality.

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## Introduction

Follower functionality, especially with regards to service output, is a significant concern in organizations. To date, there is no one way of improving follower functionality. Debates continue about the best ways of improving follower functionality. This article presents the sociability of the leader as one of the ways to

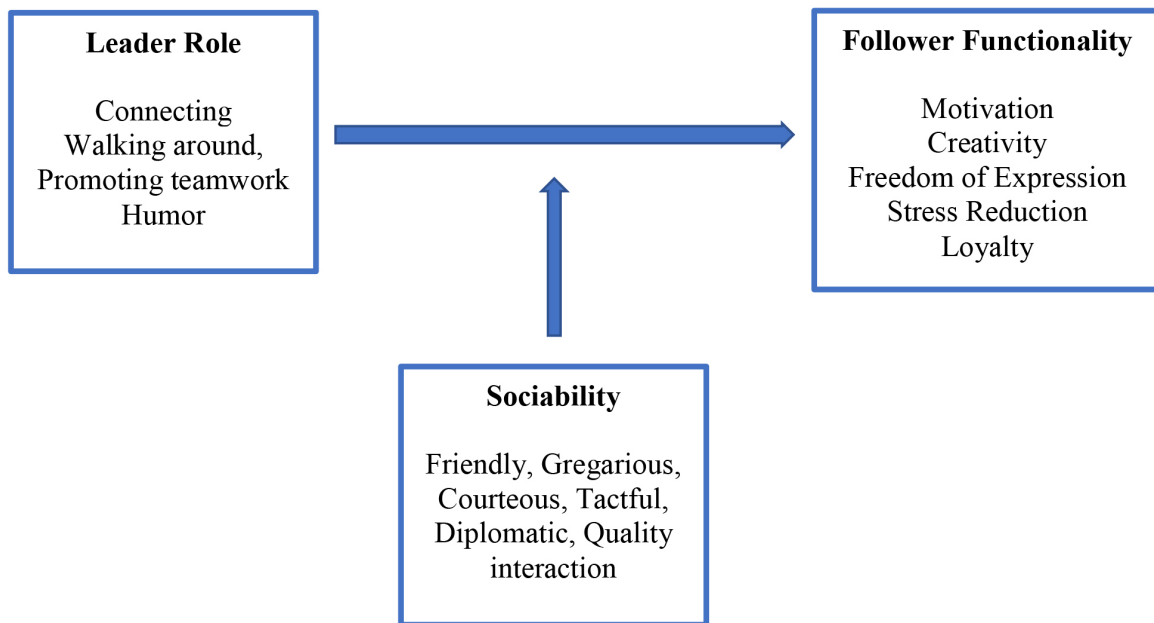


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework – Leader Sociability determining Follower Functionality.*

### The Value of Interpersonal Relationships

Much research has been conducted about the value and need for human relationships. While several needs drive people, the need to have a good relationship or get along with others is among the most prominent needs (Howell, 2017). This is also true in the work environment. Therefore, it would be in the organization’s best interest to strongly emphasize relational strategies, whether through physical or virtual interactions (Netting, 2013). In fact, Kreijns, Kirschner, Jochems, and Buuren (2004) discovered that the higher the sociability, the higher the chances for social interactions to occur, creating a social space conducive to the cultivation of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the leader who has the sociability trait influences the extent of interpersonal relationships, given that such relations and interactions improve organizational performance (Weick, 1979).

Leaders who cultivate interpersonal relationships with followers make considerable investments in their integrity and the organization’s output. Posner and Kouzes (2007) argue that it is the leader’s responsibility to build trust and accelerate relationship development for better results. The effects are personal and organizational. This idea corroborates Jang and Ryu’s (2011) argument that social interactions improve the leader’s skills. According to Reb,

Chaturvedi, Narayanan, and Kudesia (2019), interaction in non-scripted ways ensures that the leader attends to the basic needs and pays attention to the feelings of followers. Such interaction helps the leader to know the followers more adequately, thereby uprooting any traces of prejudice.

Furthermore, the same interaction creates a unique interface pathway with each follower, which is more desirable than generalized synergy (Carson, Carson, Gila & Baucom, 2004). Bennis (2007, p. 3) concluded that “leadership is grounded in a relationship,” meaning, effective leadership takes place via a healthy relationship. For this reason, Leader-member exchange (LMX) research argues that “effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers can develop mature relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring” (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995, p. 225).

### Role of Leader-Member Theory through Sociability Trait

Whereas both the leader and the follower have a role in improving the quality of the LMX theory, the focus in this article is on the sociability of the leader. No doubt, the LMX theory sets the tone for organizational spaces to be seasoned with sociability. The LMX theory concerns itself with

the interactions between leaders and followers, highlighting the dyadic relationship between the two as critical in the leadership process (Northouse, 2019). The underlying strength of the LMX theory is the full expression of trust advocated by the follower towards the leader (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

Trust is the currency of relationships. Therefore, LMX thrives when the leader is trusted and appreciated. In turn, followers efficiently respond and freely express their feelings and suggestions without fear (Zhao, 2014). According to Hassan, Mahsud, Yukl, and Prussia (2013), the quality of LMX is determined by the leader's personality. This determination corroborates Park, Gyu Park, Sik Kim, Yoon, and Joo's (2017) belief that the quality exchanges amongst the leadership team and followers foster a congenial atmosphere, making the followers trust more and feel valued. Trust is confidence in the leader. Being valued enhances trust. As such, the follower's functionality is enhanced on this trust and feeling. Since sociability is a personality trait (Haage, Maran, Bergvall, Elmhagen, & Angerbjörn, 2017; Jokela, Kivimäki, Elovainio, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2009; Lorincová & Lelková, 2016; Umamaheswara & Mukhopadhyay, 2019), the leader's personality determines and defines the type of relationship that the leader and the follower will establish.

Being approachable emanates from the level of friendliness one displays. Lane and Hays (2008) discovered that sociability plays a pivotal role in navigating through social and cultural differences. Culture is pervasive and powerful (Widstrom, 2011). It is logical to conclude that no human personality has ever existed without culture (Maiko, 2004) because human beings express themselves in the context of their culture. The advent of social media and developed transport systems has made the world a global village. The good thing about sociability is that it cuts across any culture. People of all cultures respond well to basic sociability because it is intrinsically humane to receive such pleasantries, warmth (Pereira, 2018; Shavitt, 2016), positivity (Watson & Clark, 1997), and genuine affection from others.

In the case of sociability and follower performance, Yoon and Bono (2016) discovered

that leadership effectiveness has a strong correlation with the leader's personality. When the personality of the leader is strong, LMX quality is also high. Through the leader's personality, the emotional well-being and health of followers are tested. Yoon and Bono found that three out of four followers are affected by the leader's personality, either for good or for evil. Dienesch and Liden (1986) postulated that personality (in this study, sociability) determines the extent and level of LMX development. Their main point is that personality affects the nature of initial interaction.

The warmth presented by the leader in the initial stages of interaction may trigger positivity and motivation for follower functionality. Howell's (2017) study concluded that the leaders' positive personality traits have a favorable impact on followers in most cases. Sociability is an excellent example of such a positive personality trait. This scenario is especially true for highly sociable leaders because this naturally creates a positive work environment and tills the space for group activity and dynamics (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005). Petrides (2001) discovered the significant correlation of sociability with both listening expertly and communicating efficiently. The underlying assumption is that the sociability trait allows followers to be open and frank.

### **The Follower Functionality Effect**

Among the strategies to develop follower functionality and performance, sociability has been deemed one of the most effective means. Beheshtifar, Rashidi, and Nekoie-Moghadam (2011) determined that personnel development and performance can be enhanced through sociability culture. This is especially true for new followers who usually need to familiarize themselves with norms and deportment. Beheshtifar and his colleagues argue that followers are confident of their success and progress in the organization as enabled by the sociability atmosphere created by both peers and leaders. The result is motivated staff.

It is clear that human capital (follower function) is heightened by sociability. The sociability environment created by the leader over time and eventually reciprocated by the follower, yields trust and friendliness (Gao et al.,

2011). Given this reality, Tung and Chang (2011) assert that such dynamic increases participative decision-making and knowledge sharing, thus drastically reducing stress (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer & Ferris, 2012; Lorinkova & Perry, 2013). Sociability is an important determinant of well-being and health (Kumar & Singh, 2013; Reyes-García, Godoy, Vadez, Ruíz-Mallén, Huanca, Leonard & Tanner, 2009). The health of followers ensures daily progress and saves the organization from absenteeism due to frequent hospital visits or leave for followers with depression.

Another effect of sociability on follower functionality and performance is loyalty to the organization because of the sense of belonging that emanates from participation. Concerning this, Schaefer–McDaniel (2004) wrote on the importance of connecting people to create social capital, which is understood as relationships with people that enable individuals to function effectively. He noted that people’s social capital framework is strongly determined by the sense of belonging in an organization or group. When belonging is felt, it is natural for the member to identify with the group. In most cases, the member stays in the group. This view is confirmed by Brzky (2010) and Kowtha (2008). It affirms a positive relationship between a culture of organizational sociability and organizational commitment. Furthermore, the regression analysis indicates a significant relationship between organizational sociability and the emotional commitment of followers.

After extensive research, Reb, Chaturvedi, Narayanan, and Kudesia (2019) claimed that high-quality LMX generates respect and open-ended obligations. With time, the obligations create a transition from self-interest to organizational interests. Consequently, the freedom of expression and comfortability with the leader enhances follower performance at two levels, in-role and extra-role (Uhl-Bien 2006). Remarking on the difference between the two, Zhu (2013, p. 26) opines thus, “The in-role behavior of the employee (follower) refers to the collection of a series of actions of the employee based on his or her role in the organization. The extra-role behavior of the employee refers to the collection of a series of actions that are not described or defined as a

part of the work or reflected in the official salary system of the organization”. Every leader would want such an environment to continue so that creativity levels are kept at high levels. Creativity increases the chance to be noticed by the leader for promotion. According to Sánchez-Ruiz, Hernández-Torrano, Pérez-González, Batey, and Petrides (2011), sociability was the best predictor for divergent thinking and creative personality in their findings. This negates the conventional wisdom that creative people are quiet and asocial (Tan, Mourgues, Hein, MacCormick, Barbot, & Grigorenko, 2015).

Closely related to creativity is motivation. Dewaele (2018) conducted a study in an academic setting to measure several variables against emotional intelligence. His results revealed that high levels of sociability correspond with high levels of motivation. Therefore, the warmth and cordiality of the leader can increase the follower’s intrinsic enthusiasm. Most leaders are enthused and motivated by followers who work hard. The drive to accomplish activities related to work attracts attention from supervisors and is met with support.

In addition to the previously mentioned follower effects, productivity is enhanced by the sociability of the leader. Karimi, Mohammadinia, Mofid, Javadi, and Torabi (2014) concluded in their study that there was a strong relationship between sociability and productivity. The strong relationship is consistent with the findings of other researchers like Francesca, Michela, Moscatelli, Kana Kenfack, Sara, Elisabetta, and Rubini (2019) and Beheshtifar et al. (2011). By fostering a sense of sociability in the organization, job satisfaction may reach high levels and ultimately lift productivity levels.

### **Leadership Role in Fostering Sociability**

The leadership role of fostering sociability has gathered momentum over the years. Sociability adds executive presence and leadership value (Hathorn, 2014). Price-Mitchell (2015) postulates that leaders of this day and age see sociability as an essential factor in dealing with an increasingly complex world. Therefore, prudent leaders need to be intentional about fostering sociability so that their organizations or institutions may contend with today’s difficulties.

Among how leaders may foster sociability are connecting, walking around, promoting teamwork and humor.

### **Connecting**

The personality of the leader plays a significant role in connecting with followers. According to Howell (2017), the leader's personality determines the level of engagement. Therefore, it is expedient for the leadership to initiate such connecting since leadership is driven by personality (Paulsen, 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2011; Zaccaro, 2007) though the debate about this has gained fresh prominence with several scholars (Brandon, 2013; Riggio, 2014) arguing that personality has an insignificant bearing on leadership. Leaders who possess the sociability personality trait are intentional about connecting with followers establish authentic relationships across generational, social, and cultural boundaries. Also, it is critical to remember the names of the followers. The level of connection becomes personal. The leader should endeavor to remember and celebrate important dates or events (like birthdays or anniversaries or graduations) in the lives of followers to connect with followers authentically.

### **Walking Around**

Management by walking around (MBWA) is a smart way to exert the leader's presence and warmth among followers to establish sociability in the workplace. Walking around benefits both the follower and the leader. Through this process, Mullins (2019) enunciates several benefits: building trust, increasing interaction frequency, demonstrating care and understanding processes by experiencing the environment of follower space. As the leader walks around the workspace, a beautiful chance of listening to the concerns of the workforce is presented, thereby reducing power distance. Consequently, the sociability milieu is increased. Another substantial increase is "reputational power" (Gruber, Smerek, Thomas-Hunt and James, 2015, p. 167).

### **Promotes Teamwork**

Leaders should rely on the strengths of teams in their quest to accomplish organizational goals.

Teams increase interaction and peer mentoring (Strnadová, Cumming, Knox, & Parmenter, 2014). In teams, the quality of interaction is heightened, and stronger ties are built, thereby facilitating sociability (Chun-Chia, 2013). Besides, leaders who practice a team-based reward system sustain the motivations of teams (Hsu, Wen & Wu, 2009) and further encourage the development of sociability. The teams become social networks from which positive relationships can be formed. Fomenting small-scale interactions like those available in team settings breaks down 'walls' and increases organizational sociability culture.

### **Humor**

Empirical studies have focused on the impact of humor and its interactive effect on follower functionality and the exercise of leadership (Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999). Various scholars like Cooper (2005) and Kahn (1989) have identified the art of humor as a vital lubricant used by leaders in organizational life to generate a positive atmosphere at the workplace (Roberts & Wilbanks, 2012). In the same vein, Hughes (2009) promotes attendance at humor workshops by leaders as a tool of reducing social distance. No wonder Gkorezis, Petridou, and Xanthiakos (2014) argue that the leader's positive humor encourages close relationships between the leader and the follower and thus stimulates higher levels of LMX.

### **Conclusion**

Relationships between the leader and the follower are crucial in meeting organizational objectives. It has been established that the sociability trait through the LMX framework enhances followers to work together to achieve a common purpose effectively. Sociability involves traits like friendliness, kindness, gregariousness, courteousness, tact, and diplomacy. From this discussion, it is evident that sociability has been a significant determinant or boost for follower functionality. However, not all leaders will naturally have the sociability trait. The good news is that sociability can be developed to balance leadership with humaneness; thus, breaking down interaction barriers (sociability). Among the things that leaders can do to foster sociability are basic practices and exercises like connecting,

walking around, promoting teamwork, and utilizing humor. For further study, in the attempt to give women a chance in leadership, it would be interesting to explore the differences in sociability levels among male and female leaders according to geo-location.

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