

Empirical Connections Between Followers' Emotional Intelligence and Followership Styles

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Emotional intelligence (EQ) has emerged as a prominent leadership topic as scholars believe that higher EQ results in better leadership performance. Although leadership literature primarily focuses on leaders, followers play an essential role in the overall leadership process. However, most studies related to EQ concentrate on how leaders' EQ impacts followers or how followers' EQ results in better follower commitment to organizations and personal job satisfaction. The overwhelming focus of EQ on increasing leader competencies or follower behavioral outcomes overlooks many other potential benefits of EQ within the workplace. Some followers enable bad leadership, while others deter such. EQ may be a critical component of how individuals view their roles as followers. If EQ influences followership, increasing followers' EQ might help derail toxic leadership behaviors. The current research explored connections between midwestern followers' EQ and followership using Kelley's followership styles and Bar-On's conceptualization of EQ, finding positive correlations between some EQ components and followership. Additionally, a manipulated star followership variable uncovered significant differences between the highest-scoring star followers and others.

Scholars have noted the importance of followers and emotional intelligence (EQ) in the leadership process (Kelley, 2008; Prilipko et al., 2019; Rajesh et al., 2019; Yadav & Lata, 2019). Emotional intelligence is as important, if not more important, to professional and personal success than IQ (Bar-On et al., 2003, p. 1799). Although EQ has general benefits for all possessors, when evaluated within the organizational context, the literature is more replete with studies about how leaders' EQ affects followers and organizational outcomes than about how followers' EQ influences leaders (Prilipko et al., 2019). Such a tendency implies that the EQ of leaders bears more importance than the EQ of followers. However, followers have an equally vital role in the leadership process as leaders themselves, as followers' behavior can determine the success or failure of any leader initiative (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2019; Kelley, 1992). Thus, exploring the relationship between EQ and follower behavior has the potential to uncover new insights regarding improving leader-follower dynamics, particularly in toxic leadership contexts (Kelley, 2008). The research question underpinning the present work is what, if any, relationship exists between EQ and Kelley's (1992, 2008) followership styles.

Literature Review

Ira Chaleff, Barbara Kellerman, and Robert E. Kelley have emerged as the three top followership scholars. Each thought leader has focused on the necessity of followers in all leadership processes. However, not all followers are the same. Many factors (e.g., culture) influence followership behavior (Blair & Bligh, 2018; Gao & Wu, 2019; Guo, 2018). This study's research question incorporates

the assumptions by Chaleff (2009), Kellerman (2019), and Kelley (1992, 2008) that followers play an important role in the leadership process by investigating a possible relationship between individual EQ components and followership styles. Before delving into the typologies proposed by these followership scholars, this literature review will first explore the construction of follower ideologies.

Implicit Followership Theory in Constructing Follower Ideologies

Implicit followership theory (IFT) emerged because of studies investigating leaders' assumptions about and biases toward followers that determine leaders' perception of and response to followers (Goswami et al., 2020; Junker et al., 2016). For example, the Pygmalion and Golem effects stem from beliefs that leader biases influence workers' behaviors in positive (i.e., Pygmalion effect) or negative ways (i.e., Golem effect; Eden, 1984; Leung & Sy, 2018; McGregor, 1957/2000). McGregor (1957/2000) posited that managers hold two basic assumptions about their workers: (a) Theory X—leaders must motivate workers through regular persuasion, rewards, punishment, and control because individuals are naturally lazy, lack ambition, and will overlook organizational needs if they are not carefully monitored; and (b) Theory Y—managers assume that people are self-motivated and desire to work hard and meet organizational needs, and any indication otherwise results from negative organizational experiences rather than from the workers themselves.

McGregor's (1957/2000) focus on leaders' assumptions about followers determining work conditions instead of

the followers' manifested behaviors underscores the strong emphasis of leaders' influence on followers in the leadership literature, thus discounting how followers' behaviors may impact leaders' views and actions (Güntner et al., 2020). Leadership is contingent on the followers' perception and acceptance of one's leadership style (Hollander, 1992). This study's focus on followers dismisses the one-directional influential approach, supporting claims that followers and leaders co-create leadership environments (Hollander, 1992; Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021; Sims & Weinberg, 2022).

In 2010, Carsten et al. and Sy presented groundbreaking studies investigating constructs that compose the traits and behaviors of followers. These studies have been fundamental to understanding subsequent IFT studies for more than a decade (e.g., Goswami et al., 2020; Guo, 2018; Sims & Weinberg, 2022; Yang et al., 2020). Sy's (2010) study supported already-established beliefs about the Pygmalion and Golem effects, revealing linkages between leader prototypes (i.e., positive assumptions about followers) and anti-prototypes (i.e., negative assumptions about followers) with followers' outcomes. Unfortunately, Sy's (2010) study on IFTs, as well as those derived from his work (e.g., Guo, 2018; Junker et al., 2016; Junker & van Dick, 2014; Knoll et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2018) also contribute to the inherent problem of scholars treating followers as submissive recipients of leaders' influence rather than proactive agents in the leadership process, as is the goal of the current study.

Carsten et al.'s Implicit Followership Study

Unlike McGregor (1957/2000) or Sy (2010), who based their work on leaders' perceptions of followers, Carsten et al. (2010) explored IFTs from the perspectives of followers, qualitatively investigating how followers socially construct their IFTs using 12 prototypical qualities and behaviors that manifested into three follower role classifications (i.e., passive, active, and proactive). Passive followers view themselves as executioners of leaders' directives, thus avoiding personal responsibility for the actions taken (Carsten et al., 2010). Active followers pride themselves on expressing their views while remaining loyal to leaders. Despite valuing their contributions to the leadership process, active followers believe leaders have more knowledge and expertise than they do. For this reason, active followers will share their feelings but ultimately defer to leaders' directives (Carsten et al., 2010). Unlike passive and active followers, proactive followers do not need leaders' advice before acting. In addition to sharing unsolicited views, they willingly challenge leaders and value their own accountability within the organization (Carsten et al., 2010). In a later study that further explored followers with passive and co-production role orientations, Carsten et al. (2018) noted that followers with a co-production perspective also engaged in problem-solving, thus serving as assets to their organizations.

Kelley's Followership Typologies

Kelley (2008) described followers according to their ability to think independently and engage in organizational activities (see Figure 1). Kelley's (1992) argument is

that follower responses determine if and to what extent followers accept leaders' behaviors. "In reality, followership and leadership are synergistic more than separate, and interchangeable more than caste-conscious" (Kelley, 1992, p. 42).

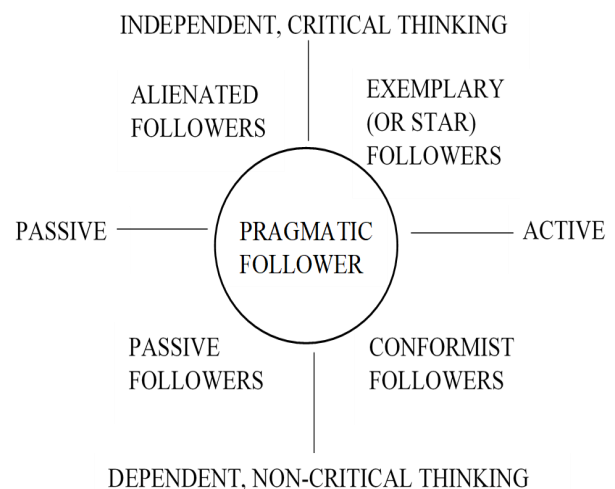
Sheep (i.e., passive followers) do not think for themselves and need leaders to motivate them into action, while yes-people (i.e., conformists) positively support leaders and blindly do what leaders instruct without ever challenging them (Kelley, 2008). Followers who do not think for themselves add little value to the organizations they serve (Kelley, 1992).

Kelley's (2008) third follower typology, alienated followers, think independently and pride themselves on having the courage to challenge leaders (Kelley, 2008). They do not lack the "courageous conscience" (Kelley, 1992, p. 168) characteristic of exemplary followers, but alienated persons acquire a reputation of a contrarian who voices constant skepticism about any and every initiative the leader or organization tries to implement (Kelley, 2008). Alienated followers appear to grasp the self-awareness construct of EQ in that they know who they are, but they fail to execute the relational aspects EQ also requires.

Pragmatic followers "sit on the fence and see which way the wind blows" (Kelley, 2008, p. 7). They are survivors who will only openly show support after knowing the direction of any new action (Kelley, 2008). Pragmatics' ability to assess and use information in a way that best suits them suggests some intelligence in processing information. However, their selfishness and failure to show concern for the organization nullify them as star followers.

Figure 1

Kelley's Followership Model



Note. Adapted from *The Power of Followership*, by R. E. Kelley, 1992. Copyright 1992 by Doubleday Business; and R. E. Kelley, "Rethinking Followership," In R. E. Riggio, I. Chaleff, & J. Lipman-Blumen (Eds.), *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (pp. 5–15). Copyright 2008 by Jossey-Bass.

The pinnacle of Kelley's (2008) followership model concludes with the star or exemplary follower who brings a high level of positive energy to the environment. They are independent, self-motivated, and show their full support of the leader (Kelley, 2008). Compared to leaders, star followers view themselves as equal partners with different roles (Kelley, 1992). Thus, star followers view speaking up to their leaders as a necessary function of their duties. Because star followers are "the primary defenders against toxic leaders or dysfunctional organizations" (Kelley, 2008, p. 14), empirically investigating if EQ relates to star followership adds to the organizational leadership literature.

Linkages Between Carsten et al.'s Work with Kelley's Followership Model

The follower role orientations presented by Carsten et al. (2010) and Carsten et al. (2018) relate to this study's research question of exploring a possible relationship between the EQ of followers and their followership style due to their constructs' similarities to Kelley's (1992) typologies—the followership model used in this study. Like Kelley (1992, 2008), Carsten et al. (2010) proposed that follower behaviors ranged between passive and proactive, or what Kelley (2008) referred to as sheep and star followers. Furthermore, Carsten et al.'s (2018) description of behaviors associated with followers with a co-production orientation closely aligns with the behaviors attributed to ideal followers (Chaleff, 2009; Kelley, 2008). A critical distinction between Kelley's and Carsten et al.'s (2010) work is that Kelley (1992, 2008) focused solely on followers' actions, as does this current research. Carsten et al. (2010) addressed the tacit prejudices of followers that undergird their behaviors and, later, how follower role orientations affected leaders' interactions with them (Carsten et al., 2018).

The passive mental orientation of a follower encompasses a belief that one should never question authority figures (Carsten et al., 2010) relates to the sheep follower role where individuals will wait on the leader to provide direction instead of thinking for themselves (Kelley, 2008). Likewise, the proactive mental disposition (i.e., the belief that followers should challenge leaders; Carsten et al., 2010) corresponds with a star follower role in which individuals "do not accept the leader's decision without their own independent evaluation of its soundness" (Kelley, 2008, p. 8). Interestingly, Carsten et al. (2010) wrote that "proactive followers were demonstrating behaviors that are traditionally associated with leadership, rather than followership" (p. 554), possibly alluding to the researchers' own implicit biases about distinctions between leaders and followers.

Challenging a leader requires followers to have skills to know when and, more importantly, how and what to say to leaders (Chaleff, 2015). "Mitigating language" (Chaleff, 2015, p. 42) enables followers to address their concerns in respectful and well-received ways. Such a skill incorporates both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, which help support the first three hypotheses proposed in this study:

H1: A statistically significant relationship exists between the self-perception EQ component and followership style.

H2: A statistically significant relationship exists between the self-expression EQ component and followership style.

H3: A statistically significant relationship exists between the interpersonal EQ component and followership style.

Carsten et al.'s (2010) research on IFTs supports an underlying assumption in this study that follower behavior will depend on how followers perceive their roles, independently of leaders' assumptions about them.

Additional Followership Typologies

Implicit followership theories determine how leaders view followers and how followers view their roles. Although the study of how followers' EQ impacts the overall leadership process has not been widely explored, the importance of followers in the leadership process is not new. Pioneer management theorist Mary Parker Follett suggested that "power should be power with not power over people" (Hatch, 2013, p. 26). At the time of Follett's work, collaboration between managers and followers was a novel idea because the main ideologies in the 1920s were scientific management, bureaucratic management, and administrative management (Ferdous, 2016). Follett's belief that followers and leaders work together supports the need to better understand factors that impact follower behavior, which is the aim of the current study. With followers having a critical role in constructing both healthy and unhealthy leadership behaviors (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021), investigating a possible relationship between EQ and exemplary followership behavior could potentially provide insight into ways to improve leader-follower partnerships.

Zaleznik's Followership Typologies

Four decades passed after the 1920s when Mary Parker Follett introduced the idea of collaborative relationships between leaders and followers until Abraham Zaleznik (1965) sought to explain why subordinates responded to authority figures in specific ways by developing a quadrant that classified followers as either impulsive (active and controlling behavior), compulsive (passive and controlling behavior), masochistic (active and submissive behavior), or withdrawn (passive and submissive behavior), according to their desire to control others and outcomes and their levels of activity or passivity.

Zaleznik's (1965) impulsive typology resembles some characteristics of exemplary followers activeness. He stated that impulsive followers rebel against authority figures in constructive and destructive ways (Zaleznik, 1965). Constructive rebellion leads followers to challenge leaders to improve and positively influence outcomes (Zaleznik, 1965).

Zaleznik's (1965) description of the constructive impulsive follower as "highly appreciated by strong authority figures who themselves tire of endless experiences with yes-men" (p. 121) connects closely with the star follower defined in the current study, who challenges leaders with the intent to improve organizational operations (Kelley,

2008). Although Zaleznik's model focused on the subordinate aspects of followership, he identified the significance of followers in the leadership process (Kellerman, 2008), which supports the entire premise underlying the current study.

Following Zaleznik, Chaleff (2016), Kellerman (2007), and Kelley (1992, 2008) all described followership typologies that range from poor to ideal followers. Although each scholar used different terminologies to elucidate their typologies, all three agreed that differences exist between follower effectiveness and that followers can influence their leaders (Suda, 2014). However, the authors' models of followership differ. Like Zaleznik, Kellerman (2019) equated followers to subordinates, a notion rejected by both Kelley (2008) and Chaleff (2008) and contrary to the assumptions in this study.

Kellerman's Followership Typologies

Kellerman's (2007, 2016) one-dimensional typology classifies followers based on their engagement level, highlighting how essential follower engagement is to leadership. Kellerman (2016) argued that leadership consists of three equal components—leaders, followers, and contexts. Under Kelley's (2008) typologies, sheep and alienated followers do not engage with the leader and cripple the leadership process by abdicating their engagement responsibilities. A somewhat engaged follower has more organizational value than a follower who does not engage (Kellerman, 2008). Kellerman's (2008) assertions about follower engagement support hypotheses 4 and 5 because, theoretically, only engaged followers can participate in organizational change or manage their emotions appropriately during the process, demonstrating several factors that make up the decision-making and stress management components of EQ.

H4: A statistically significant relationship exists between the decision-making EQ component and followership style.

H5: A statistically significant relationship exists between the stress management EQ component and followership style.

While Kellerman's (2016, 2019) work on followership has helped in outlining this research, ultimately, her classification of followers as subordinates contributes to the negative connotation associated with the role of followers and, thus, does not align with the assumptions outlined in this study.

Chaleff's Followership Typologies

Chaleff (2009) refuted that a follower equals a subordinate, stating that followers share a common goal with leaders. He coined the term "courageous followership" (Chaleff, 2009, p. 4) to denote followers' responsibility to speak up to their leaders about actions or policies that conflict with the followers' values. According to Chaleff (2009), followers interact with leaders in one of four ways, depending on their level of support and willingness to challenge their leaders.

The optimal follower acts as a partner, providing high support and an increased willingness to challenge leaders

(Chaleff, 2009). These followers embody the courageousness Chaleff (2009) promoted and can speak to leaders in non-threatening ways (Chaleff, 2015). Chaleff's (2009) typology proves helpful to the current study for two primary reasons: (a) He demonstrated the insufficiency of engagement alone in followership, and (b) His partner typology is synonymous with the ideal follower style (i.e., star) used in this study.

Hypothesis 3 states that statistically significant differences between the interpersonal EQ component and followership style. Interpersonal competencies require social skills that empower individuals to remain cognizant of others' feelings and "express one's feelings and thoughts nondestructively" (Bar-On, 2006, p. 14). Exemplary followers internalize organizational goals and see the execution of such goals as a mutual responsibility between them and leaders (Kelley, 1992). In other words, these star followers partner with their leaders and do not hesitate to express their feelings to leaders constructively (Kelley, 2008). Exemplary followers have a reputation for adding value to the organization (Kelley, 1992, p. 129). Thus, the final hypothesis in this study is as follows:

H6: Star followers will have a higher composite EQ score than others.

Testing the hypothesis that star followers will have a statistically significant difference in their composite EQ scores over other followership styles may support increasing the followership styles of others, such as sheep who do not have a partner mentality. Although Kelley (1992) and Chaleff (2009) both used a two-dimensional approach, Kelley's is the only model that provides empirical support via the Kelley Followership Questionnaire, which is one of the instruments used in this study (Al-Anshory & Ali, 2014; Essa & Alattari, 2019; Francis, 2014; Kalkhoran et al., 2015; Oyetunji, 2013).

Emotional Intelligence

While Kelley (1992) did not specifically mention the EQ of exemplary followers, he opined that the most effective followers have a "courageous conscience . . . [that gives them] the ability to judge right from wrong and the fortitude to take affirmative steps toward what one believes is right" (p. 168). Self-awareness, which requires reflective analyses to recognize one's feelings and the underlying thoughts informing them, is one of the critical components of EQ (Goleman, 2005). Goleman (2005) posited that once individuals become aware of their feelings, those who exhibit self-awareness in an emotionally intelligent manner can appropriately evaluate and adjust their mood and behavior as needed. Thus, the supposition by Kelley (1992) that exemplary followers have a "courageous conscience" (p. 168) and the essentialness of self-awareness for EQ align with the study's aim to use empirical analysis to investigate if any correlations exist between followership styles and EQ.

Salovey and Mayer's Model of Emotional Intelligence

Scholars note three origins of EQ: (a) in Indian culture that emphasizes controlling emotions to live with others

peacefully (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013); (b) in the writings of Aristotle and Plato (Dhani & Sharma, 2016; Goleman, 2005); and (c) in the work of Edward Thorndike, who began his work on intelligence by studying animals' actions (Galef, 1998). While each of these premises may hold some truth, Salovey and Mayer's seminal writings on EQ sparked others to investigate the concept further (e.g., Bar-On, 2005; Goleman, 2005; McClellan et al., 2017; McEnrue & Groves, 2006).

They conceptualized EQ as "the ability to monitor one's own feelings and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1989, p. 189). Their definition of EQ assumes that EQ makes a difference in executing behavior. As the first scholars to conceptualize EQ, they posited that emotional learning encompasses speaking up about the insights gained from emotional introspection (Salovey & Mayer, 1989). Star followers demonstrate high EQ because they know who they are and what they value. They will not conform to leaders or policies that misalign with their consciences (Kelley, 1992).

Goleman's Model of Emotional Intelligence

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, Goleman (2005) expounded EQ into clearer components (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management), elucidating EQ as abilities that empower people "to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; [and] to emphasize hope" (p. 34). He argued that feelings become as essential as thoughts when determining decisions and actions (Goleman, 2005). In other words, the enactment of EQ requires self-control (Goleman, 2005).

Star followers express themselves constructively (Kelley, 2008). Such expression requires a balance between the extremes of allowing feelings to overwhelm one's person and failing to acknowledge the existence of emotions (Goleman, 2005). The first two hypotheses in this study (i.e., H1 and H2) suggest that intrapersonal components of EQ vary among followers. Self-awareness requires reflective analyses to recognize one's feelings and the underlying thoughts informing them (Goleman, 2005). Thus, star followers exhibit such confidence when expressing themselves because they have already processed the information about themselves and the germane issues to determine the disconnect with their personal values.

Furthermore, Goleman (2014) stressed that those with high EQ have the relational skills to collaborate with others and build a collective organizational identity. Building a collective identity requires one to internalize the values of the organization. Kelley opined that exemplary followers identify with organizational goals and view themselves as partners with leaders in carrying out the responsibilities needed to achieve the stated goals (Kelley, 1992,

2008). Although Goleman (2014) used leaders as examples when describing his EQ model, the Goleman model of EQ aids in understanding how the characteristics of those with high EQ align with the description of star followers used in this study.

Bar-On's Model of Emotional Intelligence and EQ Studies

Bar-On (2006) preferred to use the term "emotional-social intelligence" (p. 14) rather than emotional intelligence, stating that EQ is a conglomerate of competencies and skills that help individuals understand and relate to themselves and others (Bar-On, 2006; see Table 1).

The conceptualization of EQ as both an emotional and social component best supports Kelley's (1992, 2008) description of exemplary followers used in this study. For example, the emotional and social skills of exemplary followers empower them to know and properly express their values, work well with others, and have a strong commitment to organizational goals (Kelley, 1992). The complementary elements of Kelley's (1992) exemplary typology and Bar-On's (2006) EQ model suggest a possible relationship between EQ and followership. However, only an empirical analysis can support or reject the hypotheses proposed in this study about the connections between the two concepts.

Scholars have found linkages between EQ and personality in that those with high EQ have better relational skills (Panait & Bucinschi, 2018). Another common theme is that EQ differs from other intelligences (Bar-On et al., 2003; Goleman et al., 2017; Mayer et al., 2016). Goleman (2005) even suggested that, in some instances, EQ bears more significance than cognitive intelligence for success. The overarching theme of EQ research is that one must know how to recognize emotions in self and others and respond accordingly, thereby resulting in better decision-making (Bolden et al., 2011; McEnrue & Groves, 2006).

Overall, EQ increases employees' job satisfaction (Jung & Yoon, 2016); reduces burnout and helps employees cope with stress (Kim & Qu, 2019); improves knowledge sharing and management (Shariq et al., 2019); and increases organizational commitment, trust, and teamwork (de Geofroy & Evans, 2017). When leaders have high EQ, they promote positive organizational climates and emotional responses in others (McClellan et al., 2017). Studies of followers' EQ have revealed EQ's benefits on followers in the workplace (Ahmad-Mughal et al., 2017; Miao et al., 2017; Nanda & Randhawa, 2019). This study extends the literature by investigating how followers' EQ impacts leaders.

A study such as the current one that dives into one potential influence (i.e., EQ) of impactful follower behavior deviates from traditional leadership studies, which tend to focus on the behaviors of those in notable positions. Even prominent leadership theories such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and authentic leadership base their premises on how leaders' behavior influ-

Table 1*Bar-On's Model of Emotional Intelligence*

Self-Awareness and Self-Expression	Social Awareness and Interpersonal Relationship	Emotional Management and Regulation	Change Management	Self-Motivation
perceive, understand, and accept self	recognize and understand how others feel	appropriately manage emotions	objectively assess feelings and think externally	maintain a positive outlook
recognize and understand emotions	identify social groups and collaborate with others	appropriately control emotions	adapt and adjust feelings as necessary	have a general sense of contentment
appropriately express self and emotions	build and maintain satisfying relationships		effective problem-solving	
achievement and actualization				

ences followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2018; Kark et al., 2018). Even the servant leadership model promotes that leaders take a secondary role by serving their followers and emphasizing how leaders' behavior will influence followers to emulate them (Hoch et al., 2018; Northouse, 2018; Rozika et al., 2018).

Emotional intelligence is a learned behavior (Goleman, 2005). Similarly, Read (2020) argued that individuals can learn better followership behaviors to improve their interaction with their leaders and other members. Scholars have observed the benefits of both concepts separately within organizational leadership (e.g., Hollander, 1992; Kellerman, 2007; Kim & Qu, 2019; McClellan et al., 2017). However, scholars have overlooked the theoretical links between EQ and followership, as the current study explores. Ideal followers exhibit behaviors consistent with having high EQ as the competencies required for high EQ (e.g., interpersonal social skills, good decision-making, and healthy stress management) mirror many of the attributes of star followers. The matching behaviors displayed by those with high EQ and star followers informed the hypotheses of this study.

Method

This study of the relationship between followers' EQ and their followership style involved a quantitative analysis with a cross-sectional design. The first instrument used was the Kelley Followership Questionnaire (KFQ). The KFQ is a 20-question Likert-scale survey where participants answered various questions about their behaviors (Kelley, 1992). The KFQ produced data indicating the respondents' thoughts and actions (Francis, 2014).

Several scholars have supported using KFQ for their analyses (e.g., Al-Anshory & Ali, 2014; Essa & Alattari, 2019; Francis, 2014; Kalkhoran et al., 2015; Oyetunji,

2013). The KFQ measured respondents' critical thinking and engagement according to how accurately they believed the KFQ items represented them (Essa & Alattari, 2019; Kelley, 1992). Scholars have reported reliability coefficients between 0.76 and 0.79 for the KFQ (Essa & Alattari, 2019; Oyetunji, 2013). Kelley (1992) used qualitative methods to validate the KFQ questions. Others validated the KFQ through confirmatory factor analysis (Gatti et al., 2014).

This study's other instrument was the second version of the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i 2.0). The EQ-i 2.0 is a self-report tool with questions and outcomes corresponding to Bar-On's (2006) conceptualization of EQ. In particular, the EQ-i 2.0 included 133 questions to assess the five components of EQ (EQ-i 2.0 Manual, 2011). This assessment has an overall Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.97 (Bar-On, 2005). Additionally, the confidence in the EQ-i 2.0 has remained high during a broad timespan. For instance, scholars writing 13 years apart noted the strong validity of the assessment (McEnrue & Groves, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2019), thus supporting the instrument's validation via factorial analysis (Bar-On, 2006).

The researcher employed a non-probability, convenience sampling approach to select participants who worked for one of four nonprofit organizations in the Midwestern U.S. states of Indiana and Ohio. (See Table 2 for each organization's demographics.) The first organization consisted of five branches of a national institution. The other three organizations were stand-alone entities without multiple locations. Table 3 displays the combined demographics of those who participated in the study.

All participants were at least 18 years or older, served in non-executive roles, and reported to at least one other person within the organization. Ensuring that respondents reported to someone with more authority than them addressed the research question more adequately and

Table 2*Organizational Demographics Estimates, Target Customers, and Location Description*

Org #	# of Eligible Participants	Estimated Gender Distribution	Estimated Racial/Ethnic Composition	Target Customers	Location Type and Place
1	283	Male: 46 (16.2%) Female: 161 (56.9%) Not Reported: 76 (26.9%)	Caucasian: 190 (67.1%) Hispanic/Latino: 9 (3.2%) African American: 1 (0.3 %) Other (Not Specified): 7 (2.5%) Not Reported: 76 (26.9%)	Families	Rural Indiana
2	3	Male: 0 (0%) Female: 3 (100%)	Caucasian: 3 (100%)	Businesses	Rural Indiana
3	28	Male: 10 (35.7%) Female: 18 (64.3%)	Caucasian: 13 (46.4%) Hispanic/Latino: 10 (35.7%) African American: 4 (14.3%) Other (Not Specified): 1 (3.56%)	Pre-K–Adults	Urban Ohio
4	9	Male: 5 (55.6%) Female: 4 (44.4%)	Caucasian: 4 (44.4%) African American: 5 (55.6%)	Teens	Urban Ohio

aligned with the intent of this study to focus on those in follower roles. Each organization's primary leader (i.e., director or CEO) sent an email to respondents, written by the researcher, asking them to participate in the surveys. Respondents had first to complete the KFQ via Survey Monkey to reveal a link to take the EQ-i 2.0, which was only available via the Multi-Health Systems website. To ensure answers from each survey were appropriately matched to a single respondent, participants were instructed to create a unique identification number to use with both instruments. Upon completion of both surveys, respondents could opt to enter a drawing via Rafflecopter to win one of up to ten \$25 Amazon gift cards per every 10 participants.

Results

The study included six hypotheses. The first five hypotheses were tested via a Spearman rho correlation with each EQ component analyzed with followership style as a whole and the individual constructs (i.e., independent thinking and engagement). Hypothesis 6 required a Mann-Whitney U analysis to evaluate if the EQ composite score of star followers differed statistically from the EQ composite scores of other followers. The sample only produced two types of followers—star and pragmatic—a suspected outcome of social desirability and non-response biases. Consequently, star followership was recoded into three levels (low, medium, and high), and hypothesis 6 was tested on both the original and recoded followership style

Table 3*Summary of Sample Participants' Demographics*

Gender Distribution	Estimated Racial/Ethnic Composition	Age	Job Title	Hours Worked	Location
Male: 15 (24.6%)	Caucasian: 46 (75.4%)	18–24: 7 (11.5%)	Leader: 43 (70.5%)	Part-Time: 21 (34.4%)	Rural: 32 (52.5%)
Female: 44 (72.1%)	African American: 2 (3.3%)	25–34: 21 (34.4%)	Non-Leader: 18 (29.5%)	Full-Time: 40 (65.6%)	Urban: 29 (47.5%)
Not Reported: 2 (3.3%)	Hispanic/Latino: 7 (11.5%)	35–44: 13 (21.3%)			
	Asian/Asian American: 1 (1.6%)	45–54: 10 (16.4%)			
	Hawaiian/Pacific/Islander: 1 (1.6%)	55–64: 7 (11.5%)			
	Other (Not Specified): 4 (6.6%)	65+: 3 (4.9%)			

variable. Table 4 displays the results of the Spearman rho correlations of hypotheses 1–5. Table 5 shows the Mann-Whitney U results of hypothesis 6.

Self-perception (H1) and self-expression (H2) resulted in statistically significant positive correlations with followership style and each construct of the variable. Self-perception had a weak positive correlation with followership style ($\rho(59) = .273$; $p < 0.05$) and the independent thinking construct ($\rho(59) = .268$; $p < 0.05$) and a moderate positive correlation with the engagement construct ($\rho(59) = .541$; $p < 0.01$). Self-expression had a moderate positive correlation with followership style ($\rho(59) = .379$; $p < 0.01$) and the engagement construct ($\rho(59) = .478$; $p < 0.01$) and weak positive correlation with the independent thinking construct ($\rho(59) = .478$; $p < 0.01$).

Of interpersonal (H3), decision-making (H4), and stress management (H5), decision-making was the only EQ component to have a statistically significant correlation with followership style that was moderate ($\rho(59) = .330$; $p < 0.01$). None of the final three components revealed statistically significant correlations with independent thinking, but they all displayed moderate statistically significant correlations with engagement—interpersonal ($\rho(59) = .416$; $p < 0.01$), decision-making ($\rho(59) = .397$; $p < 0.01$), and stress management ($\rho(59) = .345$; $p < 0.01$).

For hypothesis 6, no statistical significance difference was found when testing the original followership variable ($M = 31.47$) with the pragmatic followership style represented in the study ($M = 25.70$; $U = 113.50$, $p > 0.05$). However, the recoded followership variable revealed that a statistically significant difference existed between the composite EQ of high star followers (M composite EQ = 36.73) and other followers (M composite EQ = 23.29; $U = 254.50$, $p < 0.05$). When considering the manipulated followership variable, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

Discussion

One outcome of the present study is that testing the components of EQ with the followership constructs separately revealed that all five EQ components had statistically significant relationships with engagement. Kellerman (2016) described followers using a single standard (i.e., engagement level), unlike other followership scholars (Chaleff, 2009; Kelley, 2008). On the surface, the results indicate that engagement may be a more significant contributor to follower behavior than even Kelley's (1992, 2008) model suggests. However, such a conclusion may be premature.

Kelley's (1992, 2008) model assumes that independent thinking and engagement equally influence followership behavior, but the current study did not support this as-

Table 4*Spearman rho Results for Hypotheses 1–5*

		Followership Style	Independent Thinking	Engagement
H ₁	Self-Perception	Weak + (rho (59) = .273; <i>p</i> < 0.05)	Weak + (rho (59) = .268; <i>p</i> < 0.05)	Moderate + (rho (59) = .541; <i>p</i> < 0.01)
H ₂	Self-Expression	Moderate + (rho (59) = .379; <i>p</i> < 0.01)	Weak + (rho (59) = .284; <i>p</i> < 0.05)	Moderate + (rho (59) = .478; <i>p</i> < 0.01)
H ₃	Interpersonal	Null (rho (59) = .213; <i>p</i> > 0.05)	Null (rho (59) = .213; <i>p</i> > 0.05)	Moderate + (rho (59) = .416; <i>p</i> < 0.01)
H ₄	Decision-Making	Moderate + (rho (59) = .330; <i>p</i> < 0.01)	Null (rho (59) = .210; <i>p</i> > 0.05)	Moderate + (rho (59) = .397; <i>p</i> < 0.01)
H ₅	Stress Management	Null (rho (59) = .182; <i>p</i> > 0.05)	Null (rho (59) = .166; <i>p</i> > 0.05)	Moderate + (rho (59) = .345; <i>p</i> < 0.01)

sumption. Perhaps the reason why the study did not reveal equality between independent thinking and engagement in connecting followership with EQ stems from the fact that the EQ-i 2.0 measures emotional intelligence rather than cognitive intelligence. Goleman (2005) proposed that individuals have two minds—the rational or thinking mind and the emotional mind or feeling mind. One could argue that independent thinking and engagement constructs of Kelley's (1992, 2008) model represent the rational mind and the emotional mind, respectively. Thus, the EQ instrument used may naturally have questions that correlate more with the engagement construct of Kelley's (1992, 2008) model. If an intelligent quotient test was used in conjunction with the Kelley Followership Questionnaire, the possibility exists that one could find more statistical significance with independent thinking rather

than engagement. However, additional research is needed to examine this possibility and better understand how independent thinking and engagement connect with followership.

The results of this work also created the need for further understanding of Chaleff's (2009) followership model, which bears similarities to Kelley's (1992, 2008). Chaleff (2009) characterized followers by their level of support for leaders and willingness to challenge them, conceptualizing support as the extent to which followers assist leaders (and peers) in executing the mission and goals of an organization without compromising their own beliefs. Although Chaleff does not directly use the word engagement, followers' support of or willingness to challenge leaders requires engagement.

Table 5*Mann-Whitney U Results for Hypothesis 6*

	Star v. Pragmatics (56 v. 5)	High Star v. Others (35 v. 26)
Mean Ranks	31.47 v. 25.70	36.73 v. 23.29
Outcome	Null (<i>p</i> > 0.05)	Significant (<i>p</i> < 0.05)

The second dimension of Chaleff's (2009) model is a follower's willingness to challenge leaders. This characteristic mirrors Kelley's (2008) criterion of independent thinking, for which this study has shown minimal support. While this work also supported Kellerman's identification of engagement as a primary contributor to followership, one should not overlook the possibility mentioned previously that the EQ-i 2.0 questions related more to engagement than independent thinking. Additionally, the complexities of followership and the organizational identities of the organizations for which participants worked may have contributed to the insufficient support given to Kelley's and Chaleff's models.

All participants worked for nonprofit organizations with altruistic, service-oriented missions. Such entities are often classified as normative organizations (Heckert et al., 2021). Schein (2017) argued that members of normative organizations usually have personal goals that align with the organizational goals. Consequently, a possibility exists that the participants of this study have not had much reason to challenge leaders, resulting in minimal support shown for the second component of Kelley's (2008) and Chaleff's (2009) followership models. Thus, one should not discredit Kelley's or Chaleff's models based on the results of this study but rather seek further understanding of the conditions that prompt followers to challenge leaders and consider how the EQ-i 2.0 may have contributed to this study's findings.

In addition to supporting the critical role of engagement in followership, this study differed from the work of others who investigated followership using Kelley's (1992, 2008) model. For starters, several scholars researched followership through the lenses of those in education (Al-Anshory & Ali, 2014; Essa & Alattari, 2019; Francis, 2014; Oyetunji, 2013). Although Essa and Alattari (2019) had a high percentage of exemplary followers, they contributed this rate to sample-selection bias. Still, Essa and Alattari identified four of the five followership styles in their study. Likewise, Kalkhoran et al.'s (2015) study of followership in various organizations revealed multiple followership types. However, this study did not align with the previous followership studies because participants only identified two followership typologies (i.e., star and pragmatic), rendering an investigation of other followership styles impossible.

Several factors may have contributed to participants identifying only two of five followership typologies in this study. The analysis includes input from only 29 of the 283 eligible participants from Organization 1. There were only 323 eligible participants from all organizations (see Table 1). One may speculate that non-respondents would identify as alienated followers based on Kelley's (1992, 2008) classification. Alienated followers disengage and resist leaders' initiatives (Kelley, 2008). If such non-respondents were alienated followers, participating in this research on their organizations' behalf would not have appealed to them.

Because such a large percentage of alienated followers has not been the norm in the literature, one should use caution before classifying all non-respondents as alienated followers. Another possibility for the low response rate from those who work for Organization 1 is that principal leaders did not distribute one or more emails. For example, one branch leader from Organization 1 did not respond to correspondence from the researcher initially. This branch leader also oversaw two of the five locations that comprised Organization 1, equating to nearly half of all potential participants. If this branch leader did not send all emails or include every employee in the distribution, the analysis does not include those who may have identified as something other than star or pragmatic followers.

Finally, another contributing factor to this study resulting in only two followership styles may be that the most engaged followers of the organizations contributed. Like alienated followers, passive followers would not have participated in the research. If the organizations in this study have succeeded in cultivating star followers, the results reflect the percentage of star followers within the organizations. One should review the outcomes holistically in context rather than as an indication of how the sample compares to the general population.

One or more of the above-mentioned factors could have contributed to the followership typologies identified in this study. Nevertheless, few scholars have investigated the connections between followership and EQ (e.g., Prilipko et al., 2019). In their study, Prilipko et al. (2019) discovered that EQ contributed to followers' attitudes about work-related assignments. Their findings supported the correlations between engagement and EQ found in this study. Moreover, the participants in the current study who scored high on followership also had high EQ scores, which supports the findings of Prilipko et al.

This study also gives credence to Kellerman's (2008) argument about minimally engaged followers having more value than disengaged followers. Bastardo and Van Vugt (2019) also noted the importance of follower engagement in the leadership process. Theoretically, if EQ helps followers view their tasks more positively, they will also be more likely to engage in organizational activities. While such an idea remains speculative, the support this study provides regarding the relationship between EQ and the engagement component of followership, along with the differences between the highest-scoring followers and others, aligns with others' claims about the two concepts (Kellerman, 2008; Prilipko et al., 2019).

Although this study shows that star followers have high EQ, indicating they can make good decisions, as Kelley (1992, 2008) suggested, leaders are still needed within organizations. Leadership is a co-created process that does not exist without both followers and leaders. The concepts of leadership and followership are co-dependent. Those who occupy formal leadership positions must work with those in follower roles for what Linville and Rennaker (2024) called "purposeship" (p. 26). "Purposeship is

the deliberate and emergent process by which leaders and followers mutually engage and influence one another to achieve their common goals” (Linville & Rennaker, 2024, p. 26).

Conclusion

Rothstein (2019) noted that everyone is a follower at some point in life. Thus, people should not devalue followership as both leaders and followers bear responsibility for organizational outcomes (Kelley, 2008). However, studies on leader-follower relationships outweigh those on follower-leader relationships (Essa & Alattari, 2019). According to Kellerman (2019), a rise in followers’ influence exists because of a massive decline in leaders’ prestige and authority. However, a rise in followership does not necessarily equate to better leadership if followers display behaviors that enable toxic leadership (Padilla et al., 2007; Race, 2019).

Much of the EQ literature revolves around leaders and how their EQ improves followers’ outcomes (Adigüzel & Kuloglu, 2019; Higgs & Aitken, 2003; McClellan et al., 2017).). Even seminal EQ authors have published materials in which they wrote about how EQ assists leaders in executing their role (Bar-On, 2006; Goleman et al., 2017; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017). While the benefits of EQ are noteworthy, the underestimation of followers and how their EQ might influence leadership has crippled scholars’ complete understanding of EQ, followership, and leadership.

The current study attempted to bridge this gap by investigating what, if any, relationships exist between EQ and followership. The data for self-perception, self-expression, and decision-making fully supported hypotheses 1, 2, and 4. These three components of EQ had statistical significance with the followership variable. However, only self-perception and self-expression revealed statistical significance with both followership constructs when the constructs were analyzed separately. The data did not support hypotheses 3 and 5. The null hypothesis for hypothesis 6 could only be rejected with the manipulated followership variable.

Kellerman (2016) described followers using engagement as the sole standard, unlike Chaleff (2009) and Kelley (2008). On the surface, the results of this study indicate that engagement may be a more significant contributor to follower behavior than even Kelley suggested. The complexities of followership and the organizational identities of the organizations for which participants in this study worked may have contributed to the insufficient support given to the independent thinking construct of Kelley’s (2008) model. All participants worked for nonprofit organizations with altruistic, service-oriented missions. Such entities are often classified as normative organizations (Heckert et al., 2021). Schein (2017) argued that members of normative organizations usually have personal goals that align with the organizational goals. Consequently, a possibility exists that the participants of this study have not had much reason to challenge leaders, resulting in minimal.

Few scholars have investigated the connections between followership and EQ. Prilipko et al. (2019) discovered that EQ contributed to followers’ attitudes about work-related assignments. Their findings supported the correlations between engagement and EQ found in this study. The findings of this current study imply that organizations must focus on increasing employee engagement and cultivating star followers by developing their EQ. Engaged individuals identify with organizational goals and consider themselves to have a personal responsibility for the success or failure of the organization (Kelley, 1992). Kellerman (2019) warned that followers can engage with bad leaders. In such a case, followers who disengage with toxic leaders have more value than those who support or engage with bad leaders (Kellerman, 2019). Thus, engagement alone cannot account for the full extent of star followership behaviors. Engagement without independent thinking leads to follower conformity (Kelley, 1992), which can result in harmful consequences for organizations and their members. Further investigation of EQ and followership seems warranted.

As a starting point, researchers can begin by replicating the current study with a different population. This study focused on EQ and followership of individuals who work for nonprofit organizations in the Midwestern states of Indiana and Ohio. Those who work for nonprofit organizations are more likely to have intrinsic values that align with the organizations’ missions (Schein, 2017). Others may investigate the EQ of those who volunteer rather than work for nonprofit organizations. Unlike employees, volunteers do not receive economic benefits from their association with organizations and, thus, may exhibit more freedom to express their viewpoints without fearing financial or other consequences. Replicating this study with a different sample, such as organizational volunteers, may provide additional insights into how followership and EQ vary among specific populations.

Researchers could also study followership in organizations where members embed conformity in the institution’s operational beliefs. For example, many church members assume that the pastor is more special than the other members (Habecker, 1990). Such a spiritual hierarchical mentality may lead to members’ hesitance to speak up to church leaders. Under Kelley’s (1992) typology, conformists are highly engaged members who value loyalty and believe in the inherent right of leaders to have obedient followers. Investigating followership in an organization where the culture may not necessarily welcome questioning leaders could provide insight into the depth of culture and followership in such institutions. As Kellerman (2010) noted, one cannot understand leadership outside of context. The same may be true for followership.

Overall, this study’s findings confirmed that EQ statistically correlates with followership among the population surveyed. However, the full extent of that relationship remains unknown, as the results of this study did not fully support Kelley’s (2008) followership model since only

engagement had significant correlations with all EQ components, and independent thinking did not. However, consider the EQ lens through which the researcher conducted the study. This study does not discredit Kelley's (2008) model. Rather, the current research supports the emotional aspect (i.e., engagement) of Kelley's (2008) conceptualization of followership.

This study contributed to the field of organizational leadership by exploring the relationships between EQ and leadership, specifically the followership aspect of leadership. However, the current research was not exhaustive. There is a critical need for additional research, as followers' influence on organizational outcomes should not be undervalued or overlooked (Kelley, 2008). The key to organizational success and longevity may not rely solely on leadership development but also on followership development since followers can influence organizational outcomes (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019).

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