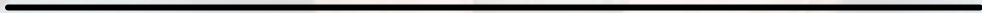


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**THE
LEADERSHIP-
FOLLOWERSHIP
ASSESSMENT
GUIDE**





Hi, I'm Nicolas! We often focus on leadership but forget about followership. Both are crucial for success. Many leaders mistake followership for buy-in, leading to failed strategies. The Leadership-Followership Matrix helps you evaluate your leadership-followership dynamics.

It maps leadership on the y-axis and followership on the x-axis, showing you where you stand. This tool helps you understand and improve your relationships, ultimately leading to better strategies and business success. Let's dive in and solve this common leadership challenge together!



LET'S GET INTO IT

We talk so much about leadership and write books about it.

But rarely does anyone write about followership. It's a bit like commenting on a tennis match purely from one side. As we've already said, where there are leaders, there must be followers.[i] To a large extent, strong leadership is about creating an effective leadership-followership relationship. This seems straightforward. But many leaders confuse followership with buy-in, which is a big mistake. Before we can explore this important distinction, we need to fully understand the different types of leadership and followership relationships and how they can set the stage for success or failure.

The Leadership-Followership Matrix shows the different situations leaders can find themselves in when trying to develop strategy.

The matrix is designed to help leaders honestly evaluate their situation and analyze the true state of their leadership-followership relationship. This is important because it is ultimately what makes or breaks strategies—and businesses. The Leadership-Followership Matrix has four quadrants with leadership tracked on the y axis and followership tracked on the x axis. The higher the leadership arrow goes on the vertical y axis, the stronger the leadership behavior. The farther to the right followership goes on the horizontal x axis, the stronger the followership behavior. In order to demonstrate what these quadrants look like in the real world, I've added a list of scenarios—all of which I've witnessed at least once in my career, most multiple times. Leaders need to be able to spot these scenarios quickly, and the Leadership-Followership Matrix can help.

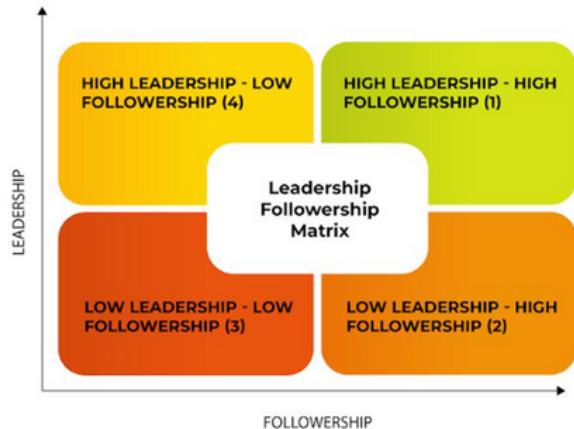


Figure 5: *Leadership Followership Matrix*. The numbers in the quadrants are for orientation purposes only and do not represent a certain order of sequence. (“*The Mammoth in the Room*”, Nicolas Pokorny, 2024)

If as a leader and team, find yourself in the upper-right quadrant (1), where there is high leadership and high followership, this may be an environment for the following positive or negative scenarios:

Positive Scenarios:

- This is a real team that has stormed, normed, and is now performing. They know what to do, which is a strong sign that the team is moving in the right direction.
- There is strong alignment between the leader and the team as well as a no-nonsense attitude. Conversations about how to align on strategy happen well before a strategy sees the light of day.
- Team members are fearless and comfortable taking risks in a collaborative, “bring it on” environment.

Negative Scenarios:

- The leader has established a culture of fear while constantly telling everyone, “Just be honest with me.” No one believes this leader will accept honest feedback, so everyone shuts up rather than challenge the boss and follows along.
- The leader has established an unhealthy culture and is surrounded by folks who try to please in return for favors. Pandering comments like, “...you make a great point leader x...” or “...I totally agree leader y...” are not only common; they are the norm.
- A young or inexperienced team believes their overconfident leader knows everything and follows blindly. Team members never challenge their leader and have no clue that he or she could be executing a flawed strategy or guide them towards a cliff.

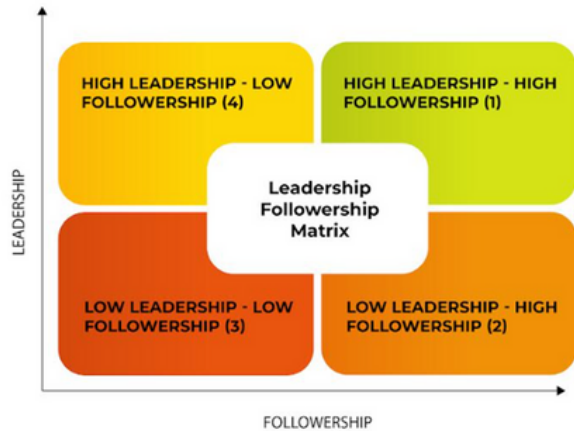


Figure 5: *Leadership Followership Matrix*. The numbers in the quadrants are for orientation purposes only and do not represent a certain order of sequence. (*"The Mammoth in the Room"*, Nicolas Pokorny, 2024)

If you find yourself in lower-right quadrant (2), where leadership is low, but followership is high, the following positive or negative scenarios could be in play:

Positive Scenarios:

- The leader is new and in the process of establishing authority, he or she is treading lightly for a while in their new role.
- A dedicated and not very experienced team believes in the leader and is prepared to support him or her with the time and energy necessary to establish a strong leadership-followership relationship.
- A highly experienced team knows what to do and is willing to coach a new or non-established leader.

Negative Scenarios:

- A new or non-established leader is struggling to establish an effective leadership-followership relationship.
- A team overpowers the leader. There's an imbalance in the leadership-followership relationship that is not in the leader's favor. Despite the leader's ineffectiveness, the team tries to keep the external picture positive to ensure the weak leader stays in place—avoiding change either because the team members like being in control or they're complacent. This power play reigns even though a leadership change might be better for the leader, the team, and the organization.
- A laissez-faire leader and/or management-by-exception and (potentially) reckless leader has built a culture of fear in which his/her employees don't dare to challenge anything.

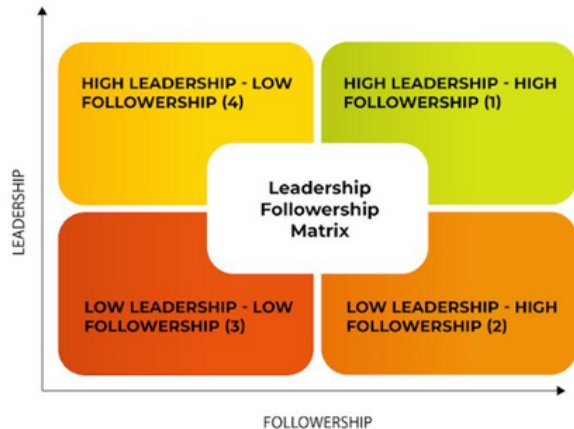


Figure 5: *Leadership Followership Matrix*. The numbers in the quadrants are for orientation purposes only and do not represent a certain order of sequence. (“*The Mammoth in the Room*”, Nicolas Pokorny, 2024)

If you find yourself in the lower-left quadrant (3), where there is low leadership and low followership, the following positive or negative scenarios could be happening:

Positive Scenarios:

- A very new team has just been formed and is still finding its footing. The leadership-followership relationship is still evolving.
- A team is faced with an unfamiliar new challenge and is struggling but still learning. Despite the challenges, the future looks bright for this team.
- A strong but inexperienced leader with good intentions needs external support to orient an inexperienced team and get them off the ground. The potential for establishing a healthy, effective leadership-followership relationship is still high, but needs some assistance.

Negative Scenarios:

- The leader is negligent and has built a dysfunctional culture where no one wants to work. As a result, everyone on the team is struggling.
- A laissez-fair leader has allowed complacency to set in. Everyone on the team has given up and no one cares about moving the company’s strategy forward. Everyone is just doing what they want to do, instead of what they should be doing.
- A new leader is facing destructive behavior from team members who oppose or won’t give the new leader a chance to develop a healthy leadership-followership relationship. This happens often when a team is “mourning” the exit of a former leader, which was potentially an involuntary departure.

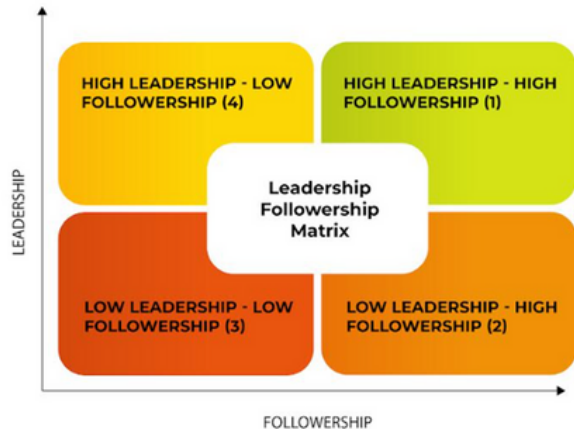


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If you find yourself in upper-left quadrant (4), where leadership is high and followership is low, the following scenarios are possible:

Positive Scenarios:

- The leader is not yet fully established. He or she is on the right track but still needs to convince some skeptical team members.
- The leader has been put in charge of a hopeful new team in the storming phase and is trying to lead from the front.
- The leader has been put in charge of a high-performing, well-lubricated team with a healthy conflict and challenge culture. There is respect, but this team does not follow their leaders blindly when they think they might be headed in the wrong direction.

Negative Scenario:

- A leader is leading from the front but doesn't recognize that the team is having trouble keeping up or is feeling left behind.
- A capable and hopeful leader has been put in charge of a destructive, oppositional team. There are frequent, unhealthy clashes.
- A new leader has been put in charge or is leading a traumatized team or a team that is still mourning the loss of a beloved former leader. Team members can no longer see the company's strategic vision and have lost their bearings. This scenario can happen to either well-intended leaders or reckless, non-inspiring ones.



As you assess in which quadrant you and your team might currently reside, keep in mind that the key is to do so with your eyes wide open. In bigger teams it makes sense to do this exercise anonymously and on team level so you can look in aggregate at the result where the team, leader and followers, place themselves.

If you can objectively understand where you are today, you'll have a much better chance to behave in a manner that will move you and your team toward a healthier and more effective leadership-follower relationship tomorrow. This, in turn, will create a strong foundation for alignment around strategic initiatives.

When the leadership-followership bond is healthy and productive, followership typically does equal buy-in; when it is not, followership has nothing to do with buy-in. This is the crucial distinction you must be able to make as a leader. It requires a clear-eyed view of the realities surrounding this important relationship.

CALL TO ACTION

Want to know more or learn about it?

- Follow our Podcast: Gain insights and practical advice on leadership traits.
- Buy the Book: Dive deeper into understanding and improving your leadership qualities

[1] Van Vugt M. (2006). *The evolutionary origins of leadership and followership.* *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10, 354–372.