

# **Digitization of Followership Collections: A Pathway to Sustaining Followership Discourse and Research**

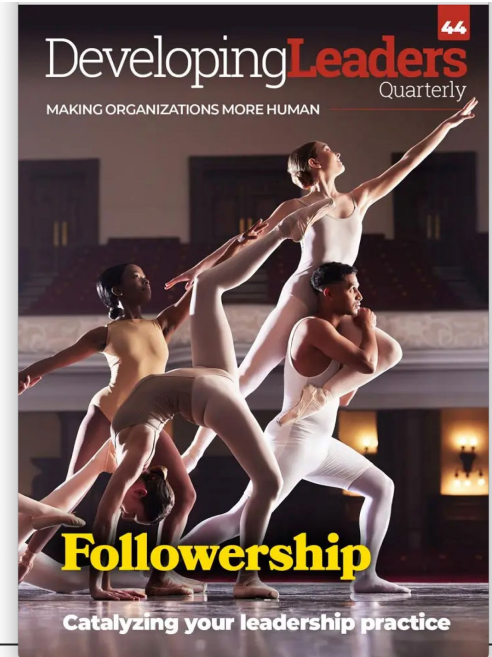
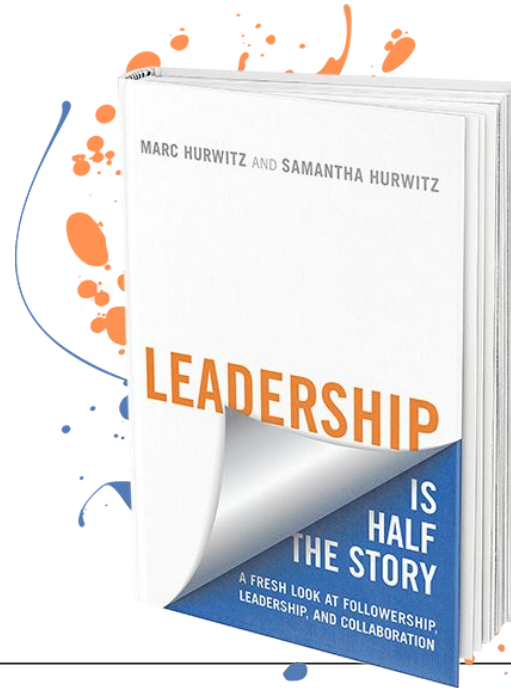
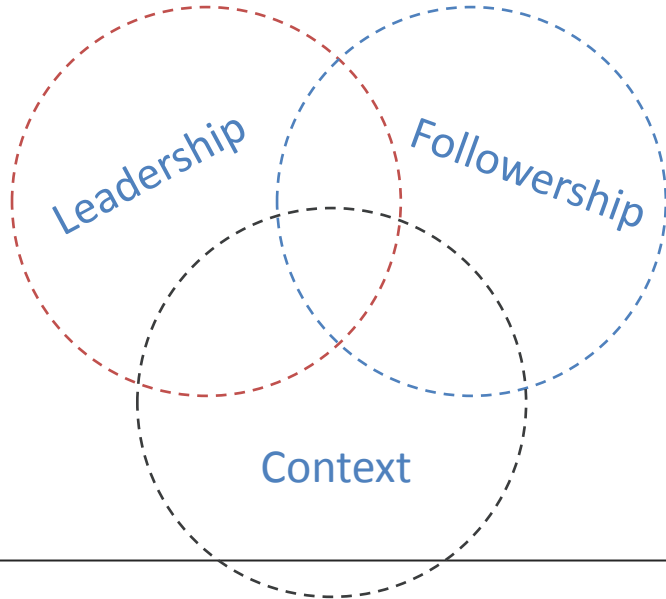
**Virginia Tech University Libraries  
Collaborative Research Grant Project Report**

**Presented by  
Eric Kaufman & Inga Haugen**

# “The F Word That's Shaking Up Leadership Development (and Making Millennials Smile)”

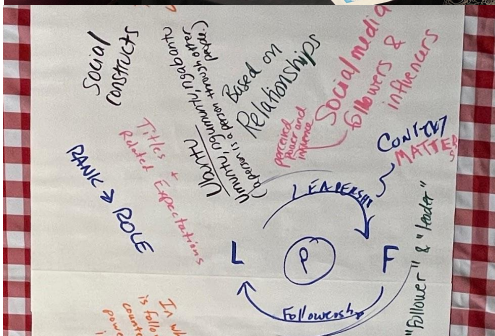
(Hurwitz, 2018)

“Followership is (FINALLY) Equally Important” (Sims, 2022)



# Project Priorities

- I. Working with the primary authors in the field to create an inventory of materials,
- II. Assessing the suitability of various libraries collection portfolios to find the best fit for long term holdings,
- III. Sourcing and digitizing of followership materials,
- IV. Cataloging of available materials, and
- V. Finalizing and sharing the digital collection.



**Co-CREATION**  
 OF BOTH LEADERSHIP  
 AND FOLLOWERSHIP  
  
**DOWNWARD  
 FOLLOWERSHIP**  
 ARE THE TERMS  
 "LEADERSHIP" AND  
 FOLLOWERSHIP ANTIQUATED?



<http://bit.ly/3ETiLir>



<https://bit.ly/ILA24WC>



<http://bit.ly/3rIWxmh>



# Followership Studies Collection Project at Virginia Tech



Link: <https://bit.ly/followershipcollect>

□ University Libraries / Research Guides / Topic Guides / PROTOTYPE SITE Followership / Home

## PROTOTYPE SITE Followership: Home

How can followership discourses be sustained and advanced over time?

- Home
- Search Words, Strings, and Hedges
- History of Followership
- Example of a Special Collection at SCUA at VT
- Example of a VT DLP housed collection
- Virginia Tech Data Repository
- VTechWorks

A Digital Collection of Followership Materials

UNDER CONSTRUCTION: A placeholder to spark conversations and collect ideas of what can be created to support followership studies discourse.





□ [University Libraries/](#) [Research Guides/](#) [Topic Guides/](#) [Followership/](#) [Home](#)

# Followership: Home

How can followership discourses be sustained and advanced over time?

- Home**
- About This Project
- History of Followership
- Search Words, Strings, and Hedges
- Data Visualizations
- AI Applications and Exploration
- Annotated Bibliography**

## Introduction

### What is Followership?

Followership is the study of how people engage and interact with their leaders and leadership. It focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers, emphasizing that effective leadership is not just about the actions of the leader but also how followers contribute to and support those actions. While leadership has traditionally been the main focus of research, there has been a shift in understanding that followership is just as important. The success of leadership hinges on how well followers understand their roles, collaborate, and drive group success.

## Agriculture, Life Science, and Scholarly Communication Librarian



# Followership: About This Project

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[Home](#) [About This Project](#) [History of Followership](#) [Search Words, Strings, and Hedges](#) [Data Visualizations](#) [AI Applications and Exploration](#)

[Annotated Bibliography](#)

About This Project

## Why We Built This

The study of followership has grown significantly over the last few decades, with scholars such as [Kellerman \(2019\)](#), [Uhl-Bien et al. \(2014\)](#), and [Kaufman & Oyedare \(2025\)](#) highlighting its importance alongside leadership studies. However, the field still lacks a centralized, accessible space where researchers can come together to explore the evolution of followership and engage with the discourse surrounding it.

We want to create a platform that would serve as a resource to the field of followership, helping scholars, educators, and anyone interested in the topic a way to get involved in the conversation. Our collection provides access to a range of resources, including [annotated bibliographies](#), [search hedges](#), [AI applications](#), and [data visualizations](#), all designed to help users dive into followership research and engage with the community.

We see this platform as a resource that will continue to grow alongside the field of followership. By encouraging ongoing discussions and ensuring these materials are accessible, we hope it will become a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners.

## How We Did It

The collection was built through the combined efforts of scholars, librarians, and experts in the field at Virginia Tech. From 2023 through 2025, we gathered materials, attended conferences like the ILA, and worked to understand the key concepts in the field of followership. Through Virginia Tech's Collaborative Library Grant, we've created a platform that organizes this material and presents it in a way that's accessible and engaging for researchers.



# History of Followership Research

## A Timeline of the History of Followership

The following image contains a timeline of milestones in the study of followership, and is used with permission from Dr. Burak Oc. While the timeline reflects the scope of the original research and thus may not be comprehensive or reflect followership's history in all cultural contexts, it is a useful introduction to some of the key milestones in the discipline. The research from which this image originally emerged can be viewed [at this link](#).

Oc, B., Chintakananda, K., Bashshur, M. R., & Day, D. V. (2023). *The study of followers in leadership research: A systematic and critical review*. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 34(1), 101674.

### Important Theoretical Milestones in the Evolution of the Role of Followers in Leadership Research (Oc et al., 2023)



# Followership: Search Words, Strings, and Hedges

How can followership discourses be sustained and advanced over time?

[Home](#) [About This Project](#) [History of Followership](#) [Search Words, Strings, and Hedges](#) [Data Visualizations](#) [AI Applications and Exploration](#)

[Annotated Bibliography](#)

[Search Terms](#), [Search Strings](#), and [Search Hedges](#)

## What Is A Search Hedge?

The concept of a "search hedge" is easiest to introduce by first defining "search terms" and "search strings".

### Search Terms

The most basic building block for using a search engine are the "search terms", or the words or phrases used to specify the information the user is trying to obtain. These are generally keywords related to the user's area of interest.

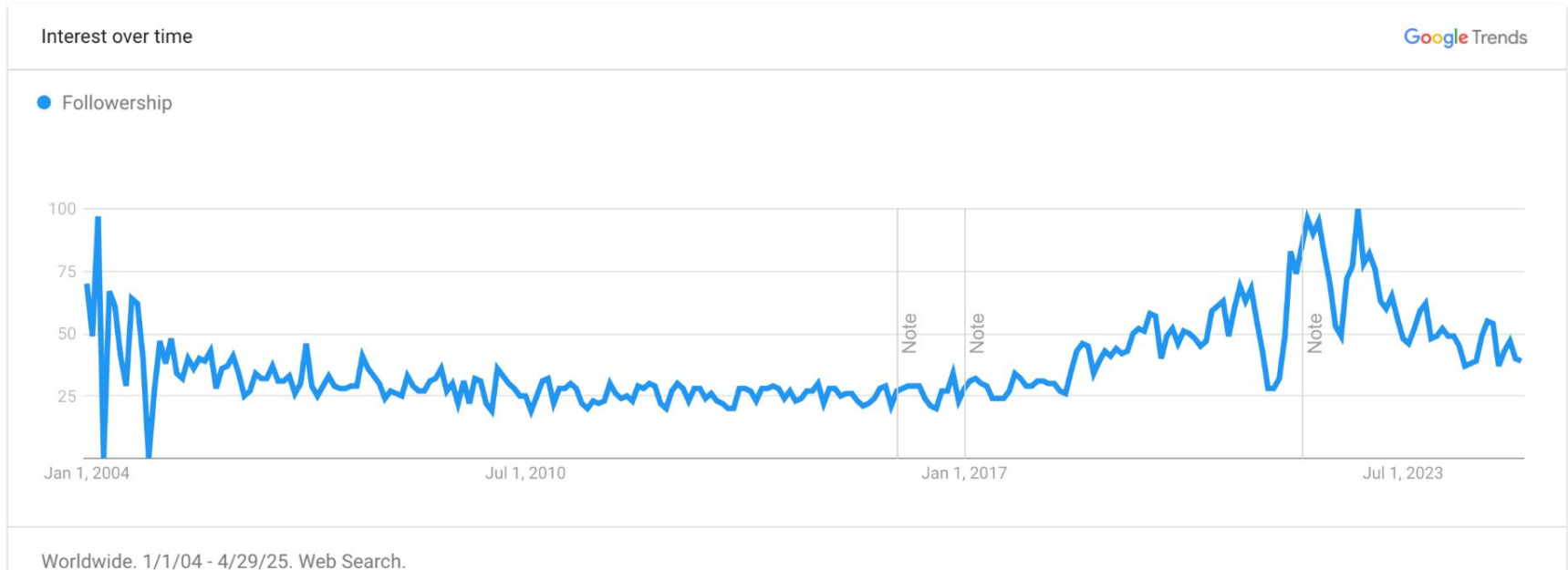
### Search Strings

Many search engines allow users to combine "search terms" into longer queries using Boolean operators like AND or NOT, quotation marks to request specific language in a specific order, and other techniques designed to add complexity or specificity to a search. The language that results from combining search terms with these additional operators is called a "search string".

# Google Trends Data on Followership

The following infographics show interest in "followership" as a topic in Google searches globally between 2004 and April of 2025. The first is a line graph depicting overall search interest in followership as a topic over time. While overall search volume has ebbed and flowed, the general upward trend in the graph suggesting a shift in how leadership and followership are being discussed in academic and professional spaces.

The second infographic is a map indicating relative popularity of "followership" as a Google search topic in different countries. While followership is not as popular of a search topic in the United States of America, it is interesting to see that countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and the Philippines have a relatively large interest in followership. It highlights global and cultural differences and the importance of creating a diverse and global collection of followership materials.



# Followership: AI Applications and Exploration

How can followership discourses be sustained and advanced over time?

[Home](#) [About This Project](#) [History of Followership](#) [Search Words, Strings, and Hedges](#) [Data Visualizations](#) [AI Applications and Exploration](#)

[Annotated Bibliography](#)

AI Applications and Exploration

## Exploration with Artificial Intelligence

One of the things we've considered while creating our followership collection is the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) in making this collection future-proof. While we are not currently building any AI models ourselves, we want to ensure that our collection is set up in a way that facilitates potential AI use for research or learning in an ethical way.

### Potential AI Applications

If AI were to be integrated in the future, there are many possible ways it could help researchers and scholars. Some examples include helping scholars quickly find resources in the followership domain, answering common followership questions, or connecting related ideas within the collection.

We have already begun experimenting with emerging technologies like Google's NotebookLM. Utilizing this AI research assistant, we were able to upload research papers and receive specific insights and summaries based on the text. One example of its success can be found in [this article](#) which was written using the help of these summaries.

One way we hope to facilitate this is through structuring the collection with machine-readable formats like JSON-LD and RDF, ensuring that it is accessible for both humans and machines. While humans would see clear, organized information that is easy to navigate, machines would see it in a way that enables integration with AI models, allowing for advanced search, automated summaries, or even AI-driven recommendations.



# Followership: Annotated Bibliography

How can followership discourses be sustained and advanced over time?

[Home](#) [About This Project](#) [History of Followership](#) [Search Words, Strings, and Hedges](#) [Data Visualizations](#) [AI Applications and Exploration](#)

[Annotated Bibliography](#)

Annotated Bibliography

## About This Bibliography

The following annotated bibliography contains a wide range of followership research that informed our team's construction of this digital collection. While it is not comprehensive, it is a useful resource for those interested in a broad view of existing research on followership.

## Annotated Bibliography of Followership Research

Baird, N., & Benson, A. J. (2022). **Getting ahead while getting along: Followership as a key ingredient for shared leadership and reducing team conflict.** *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 923150.

The researchers bring unique perspectives to shared leadership research by exploring the phenomenon through the lens of followership. Shared leadership has been commonly researched from the lens of leadership and how every team should play leadership roles in solving problems. The authors identified that shared leadership is a relational process that involves a dyad interplay between leadership and followership; and followership is a necessary ingredient for high levels of leadership to exist within a team. To establish this, the authors conducted a quantitative study measuring the relationships between effective leadership, effective followership, dyadic relationships conflict and team-referent relationship conflict among student teams. **Keywords:** followership, shared leadership, team conflict, social relations model (SRM), multilevel structural equation model (MSEM), leader-follower dynamics



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followership](https://guides.lib.vt.edu/followership)

Thank You!