

# **A Conceptual Framework to Guide Leader and Follower Education, Development, and Assessment**

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*Leader and follower education and development is essential, yet a challenging task. It is helpful to have a conceptual framework with specific elements to determine where to sustain and improve efforts. A leader-follower conceptual framework was recently developed to include four “C” elements (Character, Competence, Context, Communication) across four psychosocial levels of interactions (Personal, Interpersonal, Team, Organizational). This framework guides the who, what, when, where, and how of effective and adaptive leadership and followership. The leader-follower conceptual framework can be used in any professional field as a guide to develop sessions, curriculum, programs, and assessments for individuals, teams, and organizations.*

*Keywords: leader-follower conceptual framework, Leader education, development, assessment, Follower education, leader, follower*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education and development of leaders and followers are essential and challenging tasks. For leader development, it is important for individuals to be able to self-assess and receive assessments from peers, subordinates, and superiors. For leadership development, it is important for teams and organizations to understand each other. To improve leader and leadership sessions, curricula, and programs, assessing where there are gaps and areas to continue and improve is necessary for leader and leadership development. In order to provide a consistent way to guide education, development, and assessments, it is helpful to have a conceptual framework with specific elements to determine where to sustain and improve efforts.

A leader-follower conceptual framework was recently developed (Callahan & Grunberg, 2019; Grunberg et al., 2018) based on a comprehensive review of relevant principles, models, and types. This leader-follower conceptual framework incorporates concepts from the extant leadership literature (Azure Consulting, 2008; Columbia College, n.d.; Day & Antonakis, 2012; Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004; Gray, n.d.; McKiernan, 2014; Northouse, 2016; Rizzo, 2012; Walter, 2014; Winston, n.d.) as well as those from the U.S. Air Force (Department of the Air Force, 2015; Price, 2004), Army (Department of the Army, 2019), Coast Guard (United States Coast Guard, n.d.), and Navy (Department of the Navy, 2019). This framework is intended to include key elements from the many valuable approaches and to convey this vast information in a manner that is easy to understand, recall, and apply. The framework is meant to

comprehensively guide the who, what, when, where, and how of effective and adaptive leadership and followership. To continuously monitor and improve program effectiveness, assessment and evaluation of teachers/coaches/mentors and learners are required. Assessments should be guided by the framework to determine if goals and objectives are met for each session and activity. This framework also can be applied to all levels of education for all types and professions of students, faculty, and staff as leaders and followers.

## **DEFINITIONS**

Day (2001) defines “leaders” as human capital (including intrapersonal knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and motivations) and “leadership” as social capital (including interpersonal relationships, and organization culture). The word “influence” is most commonly used with regard to leaders and leadership. (Northouse, 2016; Yukl, 1981). Leaders are considered as individuals who are aspirational and inspirational who influence individuals, groups, organizations, and systems while being able to remove barriers. They are able to set vision with an emphasis on motivation and inspiration through innovative and creative ideas. Leadership is influence on individuals and groups by enhancing behaviors, cognitions, and motivations to achieve goals that benefit the individuals and groups (Callahan & Grunberg, 2019; Grunberg et al., 2018; Northouse, 2016; Yukl, 1981). Leadership refers to social psychological processes, interpersonal and group dynamics.

Without followers, there cannot be leaders. Additionally, within teams, leader roles may be shared. It is therefore important also to consider followers when discussing teams. Followership refers to actions of individuals who are not in leadership roles (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2008, 2012). The word “follower” can refer to a personality type, position in a hierarchy, role, traits, or behaviors. These individuals are members of a team who contribute to the team’s goals, align with the leader, and adapt. On the flip side, followers also might not contribute, not align with the leader, and not adapt (Barry, Grunberg, & McManigle, 2019; Kellerman, 2008). It is important to take into account the influence that followers can have on leaders and other team members. The word follower has previously implied a passive, dependent, and/or submissive role. But over the past few decades, the follower role has become a more active role and important in team effectiveness. Leaders, by their position/role, have more power, authority, and influences than do followers, but the follower role should not be underestimated (Kellerman, 2008, 2012).

In a world that revolves around teams, it is important to understand that the different members of a team allow a team to function effectively. Teams are composed of a “small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1999, p. 45). The common purpose, goals, and approach must be clear and understood by all members on the team. It also is requisite that all members of the team understand everyone’s role and expectations of every team member (Hackman, 2002). In some situations and on some teams, the leader sets the vision, selects team members, and indicates procedures to follow, where the followers contribute as directed. In contrast, some situations and teams have the team members set the vision, select appropriate team members and procedures, and perform to achieve goals. Understanding the distribution of decision-making among the leader and followers affects team performance, cohesiveness, morale, and outcomes (Gordon, 2013; Hackman, 2002).

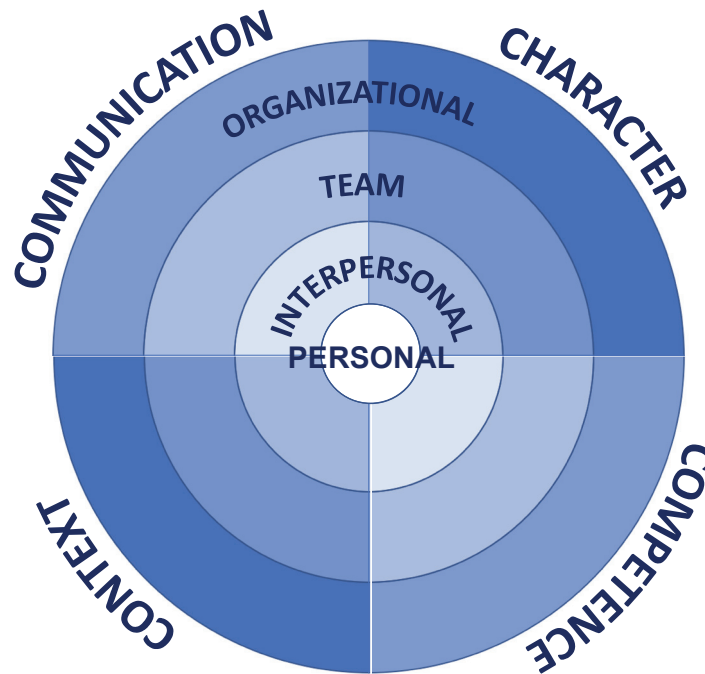
## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The leader-follower conceptual framework can be used for leader, follower, team, and organizational education, development, and assessment. Some elements may be more important for each individual, team, or organization depending on current position, strengths, and areas needed for growth, but all elements are important for development.

This framework includes four “C” elements – Character, Competence, Context, Communication – which operate across four levels of psychosocial interaction – Personal, Interpersonal, Team, and

Organizational (Grunberg et al., 2018; Price, 2004). The Four “C” elements and the psychosocial levels of “PITO” interact and operate simultaneously (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1  
LEADER-FOLLOWER CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**



Leader-Follower conceptual framework depicting the four “C” elements (Character, Competence, Context, Communication) across the four psychosocial levels of interaction (Personal, Interpersonal, Team, Organizational).

#### **“C” Elements**

Character is “who” the individual is. Character refers to physical and psychological aspects of the person. Physical aspects include demographics and physical attributes and characteristics. Psychological aspects of the individual include attributes such as self-awareness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, reliability, personality, ethics, and values.

Competence is “what” the individual knows and does. Competence includes skills in knowledge in two areas: role specific and transcendent knowledge and skills. Role specific knowledge and skills are those that are needed to accomplish a specific job such as a physician, nurse, attorney, engineer, teacher, musician, athlete, carpenter. Transcendent knowledge and skills are those that are not role specific but are required for all jobs such as critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, motivating others, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution.

Context is “when and where” leadership or followership occurs. Context can be broken down into six categories: physical, psychological, social, cultural, situational awareness, and stress. Physical includes what is outside of us (e.g., time of day, climate) as well as inside us (e.g., hunger, fatigue, illness). Psychological includes the behavioral health of the members of the team as well as conscious and unconscious biases. Social includes group dynamics such as how individuals interact with each other and varies based on group size. Cultural refers to cultural values, practices, attitudes, and beliefs (e.g., based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, belief systems, nationality, family background, and upbringing). Situational awareness is important for safety and optimal performance of individuals, teams, and

organizations. The effects of physical and mental stress must also be considered, which includes positive (eustress) or negative (distress) stress.

Communication is “how” individuals interact with each other. Communication includes verbal (oral and written) and nonverbal information (e.g., body language, facial expressions, paralanguage) that is sent and received. It is extremely important that the message sent is received and understood the way it is intended.

### **PITO Elements**

The Personal element refers to the individual leader or follower. This level focuses on self-awareness, knowledge and skills appropriate for one’s role, effective communication, and appropriate situational awareness.

The Interpersonal element refers to dyadic relationships, such as physician-patient, teacher-student, attorney-client, leader-follower, peer-peer. This level focuses on working and communicating effectively and respectfully with other individuals in all situations, understanding the other individual and having awareness of how one is perceived, and applying appropriate knowledge and skills with others.

The Team element refers to a small group of people with complementary skills who are mutually committed to common goals. The Team level includes building team values, trust, and cohesiveness; working and communicating effectively in various situations; understanding team dynamics and responding appropriately.

The Organizational element refers to large groups, institutions, and systems. This level focuses on broad understanding of the vision and mission; ability to inspire values; applying smooth transitions and communication among individuals, teams, organizations; understanding various cultures.

### **HOW THE FRAMEWORK CAN GUIDE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

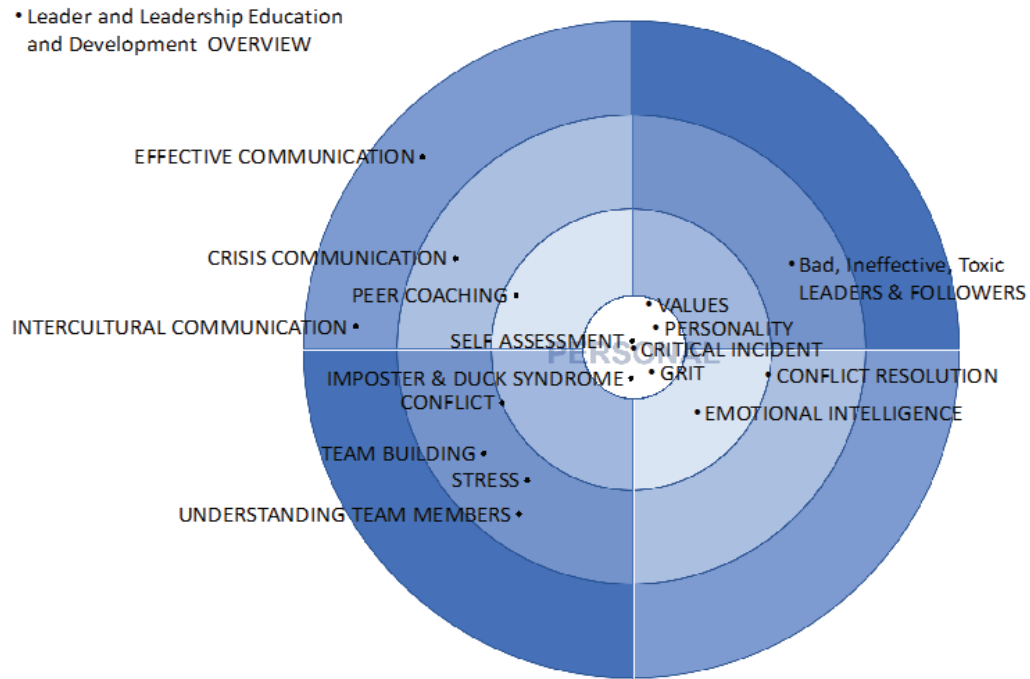
Leader, follower, leadership, followership, and team education and development are important topics for all professional fields. Each individual, team, and organization faces leadership challenges. What is needed to make improvements for one individual, team, or organization may be different for another. It is important to know what particular challenges and opportunities exist to determine a way forward with education and development. The leader-follower conceptual framework can break down the who, what, when, where, and how of effective leadership and followership to enhance education and development at all levels of education and professional development.

The leader-follower conceptual framework is useful to plan sessions ensuring that important areas of development are part of the curriculum. Whether that curriculum is for a single workshop, a multi-year curriculum, or coaching sessions, this framework can help guide specific content. Topics can be mapped onto the framework to help learners understand the major focus of sessions. More expansive curricula can be mapped onto this framework forming a curriculum map. Additionally, the framework can be used to perform a gap analysis to determine whether and which elements may be missing from the curriculum. This analysis is especially important with larger curricula development to be sure all elements (i.e., the leader-follower elements needed for the individual, group, or organization) are included.

It is important for individuals to grow their self-awareness to improve their own performance. For development, the framework can be used to help guide reflections on individuals, teams, organizations, and situations. Focus can be on challenging situations and reflect on which elements may have played a role in the challenge. These challenges can move into reflections about self, others, or situations. These reflections can guide individuals to determine the who, what, when, where, and how things went well and did not go well.

Figure 2 provides an example of topics within a four-year leader and leadership education and development curriculum that has been mapped onto the leader-follower conceptual framework. From this figure, it is apparent that there are many sessions that touch upon Context, Communication, Personal, and Team. It allows the program to determine if there is a need to focus on additional areas. Additionally, as new topics arise, they can be added to the curriculum map.

**FIGURE 2  
AN EXAMPLE FOUR-YEAR CURRICULUM**



A four-year curriculum mapped onto the leader-follower conceptual framework.

**HOW THE FRAMEWORK CAN GUIDE ASSESSMENT**

As curriculum is developed and individuals, teams, and organizations strive to improve, it is important to determine where there are areas for opportunities for improvements and where improvements have been made. It is important that assessments are guided by a conceptual framework to determine that individual, team, session, curriculum, organizational goals and/or objectives are met.

The leader-follower conceptual framework also can help guide assessments to determine opportunities for growth and continual improvements by monitoring progress. Similar to education and development, assessments can be mapped onto the framework to identify areas of growth and opportunities for continual improvements. Using this framework, the assessments can focus on 16 cells (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3  
ASSESSMENT GRID**

	<b>Personal</b>	<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Team</b>	<b>Organizational</b>
<b>Character</b>				
<b>Competence</b>				
<b>Context</b>				
<b>Communication</b>				

Assessment grid using the leader-follower conceptual framework.

Figure 4 provides an example assessment measure using the leader-follower conceptual framework as a guide. This specific example is used in a military medical field practicum where medical students rotate through different leadership positions during a four-day exercise. For each leadership position, students are rated on the eight elements of the leader-follower conceptual framework; some elements are broken down into sub-elements to look closer at particular characteristics within the overarching element (see Barry, Dong, et al., 2019 for additional information about the leadership positions and this field exercise).

**FIGURE 4  
AN EXAMPLE ASSESSMENT CARD**

MFP LEADER ASSESSMENT REPORT										Additional Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
(F = Fail; MP = Marginal Performance; P = Pass; H = Honors; N/O = Not Observed)										Spot Report <input type="checkbox"/>	
										COMMENTS	
<b>PERSONAL (P)</b> self-aware; knowledgeable and exercises appropriate skills; effective communicator; situational awareness	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>INTERPERSONAL (I)</b> works and communicates effectively and respectfully with other individuals in all situations	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>TEAM (T)</b> builds team values, trust, and cohesiveness; work and communicate effectively in various situations	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL (O)</b> understands vision and mission; inspires values; smooth transition and communication to next group	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
DATE	TRAINING DAY		OVERALL ASSESSMENT		F	MP	P	H	AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT		
RATED OFFICER NAME	TRAINING PROGRAM					PLATOON		EVALUATOR'S NAME			
										<input type="checkbox"/> SOM <input type="checkbox"/> GSN <input type="checkbox"/> IntI	
RATED OFFICER INITIALS	DUTY POSITION							EVALUATOR'S SIGNATURE			
										<input type="checkbox"/> PL <input type="checkbox"/> APL <input type="checkbox"/> SRG <input type="checkbox"/> ATL <input type="checkbox"/> BHO <input type="checkbox"/> PM <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
FOLLOWER TYPE (AL = Aligned; NAL = Not Aligned)					NOTES ON FOLLOWER TYPE						
<input type="checkbox"/> Isolate <input type="checkbox"/> Bystander											
<input type="checkbox"/> Participant AL <input type="checkbox"/> Activist AL <input type="checkbox"/> Diehard AL											
<input type="checkbox"/> Participant NAL <input type="checkbox"/> Activist NAL <input type="checkbox"/> Diehard NAL											

FourCo Ratings (over)

MFP LEADER ASSESSMENT REPORT											
(F = Fail; MP = Marginal Performance; P = Pass; H = Honors; N/O = Not Observed)											
										COMMENTS	
<b>CHARACTER (CH)</b> self-awareness, confidence, humility, integrity, empathy	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>COMPETENCE (CP)</b>											
<b>Role Specific Skills</b> role specific knowledge and skills	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>Leadership Transcendent Skills</b> critical thinking, decision making, emotional intelligence, influences and inspires others	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>CONTEXT (CX)</b> adapts to social situations, environments, and stress; situational awareness; demonstrates cultural sensitivity	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>COMMUNICATION (CM)</b>											
<b>Sending</b> conveys goals, thoughts, and ideas effectively; closed-loop communication; adjusts to context	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>Receiving</b> actively listens to others, recognizes and addresses misunderstandings	F	MP	P	H	N/O						
<b>Non-Verbal</b> matches non-verbal to verbal communication; effective/appropriate use of non-verbals	F	MP	P	H	N/O						

PITO Ratings and Overall Assessment (over)

A Leader Assessment card that uses the leader-follower conceptual framework as a guide for assessment.

## CONCLUSIONS

As leader and leadership education and development programs continue to arise, a conceptual framework that can provide a consistent guide for education, development, and assessments is essential. The leader-follower conceptual framework includes information from many valuable approaches to leader and leadership development. This framework guides the who, what, when, where, and how of effective and adaptive leadership and followership. The leader-follower conceptual framework can be used in any professional field as a guide to develop sessions, curriculum, programs, and assessments for individuals, teams, and organizations.

## Disclaimer

The opinions and assertions contained herein are the sole ones of the authors and are not to be construed as reflecting the views of the Uniformed Services University or the Department of Defense.

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