

HOW DOES SOLUTION-FOCUSED MANAGEMENT INFLUENCE FOLLOWERSHIP BEHAVIOR?

Minoru Nishinobo

*Department of Management & Organisation, National University of Singapore Business School
(Singapore)*

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to: (1) empirically clarify how solution-focused/problem-focused communication what is called “the solution management” in the workplace influences the followership behavior of Japanese non-managers and (2) empirically clarify the difference in the followership behavior of Japanese non-managers focusing on the difference in the nationalities of their manager. To fulfill these purposes, we took an empirical approach to verify hypotheses derived from past research. We conducted 300 full-time employees in Japanese organizations from a diverse range of industries to participate in this research through the Internet survey company. However, we excluded some answers because inappropriate responses were included. We wanted to examine the followership behavior of Japanese followers toward their managers, so we selected the respondent who was in a non-managerial position and whose manager was in a managerial position. Thus, the final analysis included 273 responses. The results of our analysis revealed the following two points. First, solution-focused management has a positive effect on followership (active behavior). Second, followers were more likely to take followership (critical behavior) and followership (considerate behavior) when their manager's nationality was not Japanese.

Keywords: *Solution-focused management, followership behavior, nationality of manager.*

1. Introduction

This research aims to empirically examine how solution-focused management in the workplace influences the followership behavior of Japanese non-managers. And how differences in the followership behavior of Japanese non-managers depend on whether the managers' nationality is Japanese or non-Japanese. The study of followership has been inadequate because it has received less attention than leadership research (Tanoff and Barlow, 2002). In recent years, followership has been given attention in different countries (Ehrhart and Klein, 2001) and research is slowly accumulating. However, Matsuyama and Mori (2022) pointed out that fewer studies have examined the independent variables of followership than those that have examined the outcome of followership. In order to develop followership theory in the future, research on the independent variables of followership will be necessary.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of followership

Most followership studies to date have defined followership as the influence or act of influence exerted by a follower (Matsuyama, 2016). For example, Crossman and Crossman (2011) defined it “as the opposite of leadership in a leadership/followership continuum, a direct or indirect influential activity, or as a role or a group noun for those influenced by a leader”. Looking at the definitions in Japan, followership is defined as “followers share organizational goals with leaders and act toward those goals to directly or indirectly influence the leader and the organization” (Nishinobo and Furuta, 2013). This research would be based on the definition of Nishinobo and Furuta (2013). Because their definition of followership is based on interviews with people working in Japanese organizations.

2.2. Independent variable of followership

Researchers have shown to have a positive influence as independent variables of followership so far are affective commitment (Nishinobo, 2014; 2015a; 2023), leadership (maintenance behavior)

(Nishinobo, 2014; 2023), official position (Nishinobo, 2015a; 2022; 2023), years of nursing experience (Nishinobo, 2022), existence of key persons (Nishinobo, 2023), middle managers' behavior (strict and rigorous management behavior, management behavior of trust and approval) (Persol Research and Consulting, 2019). As reviewed above, there is less research on the independent variables of followership than the outcome of followership (Matsuyama and Mori, 2022; Matsuyama et al., 2023). Herdian et al. (2022) reviewed past research on independent variables and dependent variables of followership, and similar trends were found. This research focuses on solution-focused/problem-focused communication, which is a workplace-level variable. That is why past research suggests that solution-focused/problem-focused communication may be an independent variable of followership.

2.3. Solution-focused management

As Kitai et al. (2017) point out, the effects of past research on solution-focused management have not been measured using a large sample size, and only successful cases have been reported. Kitai et al. (2017) examined an empirical study. The results of the analysis showed that solution-focused management didn't influence proactive behavior. However, the interaction between goal interdependence and solution-focused communication had a positive effect on proactive behavior. We point out several problems in their study. First, the measurement scale of job crafting was used in this research. Furthermore, only two items were being used for each solution-focused/problem-focused communication questionnaire. That's why the reliability problem-focused communication was low at 0.528. Therefore, valid and reliable measurement scales for solution-focused management should be used in future research.

3. Theory and hypotheses

3.1. The effect of solution-focused approach on followership

Proactive behavior is seen as one element of followership behavior. For example, Uhl-Bien et al. (2013) categorized followership behavior into nine elements, and one of them is proactive behavior. Although this research differs from the above studies in its definition and positioning of followership, there is no problem in considering proactive behavior as an aspect of followership. This is because proactive behavior is similar to the concept of followership (active behavior), which is the position of this research. The definition of followership in this research is "followers share organizational goals with leaders and act toward those goals to directly or indirectly influence the leader and the organization". In other words, organizational goals are shared between leaders and followers, and a state of high goal dependence is assumed. In light of these arguments, we proposed the following:

- Hypothesis 1: Solution-focused management positively influences followership (active behavior).

3.2. The effect of the nationality of the manager on followership

We couldn't find that kind of research in past research that Japanese followers do followership behavior toward foreign managers. Komatsu and Kougo (2013) reported that Japanese followers tend to feel positive about foreign managers' clear goal setting, division of roles, open communication, and positive feedback. In other words, Japanese followers may find it easier to take followership behavior when their manager is a foreigner. In light of these arguments, we proposed the following:

- Hypothesis 2: Japanese followers take followership behavior when their manager is a foreigner.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants and procedure

We wanted to examine the followership behavior of Japanese followers toward their managers, so we selected the respondent who was in a non-managerial position and had a manager in a managerial position. Thus, the final analysis included 273 responses. The survey was conducted on February 22, 2023. The web survey screen provided explanations about ethical considerations and guarantees of anonymity, and consent for participation in the survey was confirmed.

4.2. Measures

Affective commitment was used as a control variable in this research because we wanted to examine the influence of purely solution-focused management on followership. This is because affective commitment is an independent variable of followership and proactive behavior. We used Kitai's (2014) measurement scale for affective commitment. A 5-point scale of responses (from 1 = I don't think so at all

to 5 = I think so very much) was used against the 3 question items. We used Kitai’s (2020) measurement scale of solution-focused management. Kitai (2020) developed a reliable and valid instrument to measure solution-focused/problem-focused communication. A 5-point scale of responses (from 1: not at all agree to 5: completely agree) consisted of a total of 14 items with 7 items each for solution-focused/problem-focused communication. We used the Persol Research and Consulting’s (2019) measurement scale of followership. This scale is based on Nishinobo (2015b) with modifications. Nishinobo’s (2015b) measurement scale had 53 items, and some of the questions were difficult for business persons to answer. The measurement scale revised by Persol Research and Consulting (2019) overcame these problems and simplified them. Parsol Research and Consulting (2019) conducted a questionnaire survey (N = 2,000). After analysis, the reliability of the scale showed sufficient internal consistency. That’s why we use this scale in this research. The items of followership are 25 total including 12 items of followership (active behavior), 7 items of followership (critical behavior), and 6 items of followership (considerate behavior). A 5-point scale of responses (from 1: never to 5: always) was used against the 25 question items.

5. Results

The average age of the participants was 36.04 years (SD = 8.2). In terms of gender, there were 148 men (54.2%) and 125 women (45.8%), with 202 Japanese (74.0%) and non-Japanese (26.0%) supervisors, 64 (23.4%) with 0 to 4 years of service, 61 (22.3%) with 5 to 9 years, 56 (20.5%) with 10 to 14 years, 44 (16.1%) with 15 to 19 years, 28 (10.3%) with 20 to 24 years, 13 (4.8%) with 25 to 29 years, and 7 (2.6%) with 30 years or more. We first checked the ceiling and floor effects for all the questions and found no problems. Subsequently, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis of solution-focused management and followership. After analysis, each two and three factors were extracted with an eigenvalue greater than 1. Since both the factor structures were as clear as a priori dimension. Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the number of factors for solution-focused management and followership were set to 2 and 3, respectively, to determine the goodness of fit. Solution-focused management was CFI=.923, GFI=.878, AGFI=.831, RMSEA=.086, AIC=228.0, and followership was CFI=.897, GFI=.822, AGFI=.788, RMSEA=.076, AIC=803.6. Thus, we judged the goodness of fit was within the acceptable range.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and correlation coefficients.

	Mean	SD	Cronbach α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Gender dummy(1:Male)	0.54	0.50								
2 Length of Service(1:5-9 years, 2:10-14 years, 3:15-19 years, 4:20-24 years, 5:25-29 years, 6:more than 30 years)	1.92	1.60		.16**						
3 Affective Commitment	2.88	0.86	0.77	.08	.04					
4 Solution-Focused communication	2.79	0.87	0.91	.03	.03	.63**				
5 Problem-Focused communication	2.94	0.74	0.85	-.03	-.03	.41**	.55**			
6 Followership (Active Behavior)	2.96	0.73	0.93	.04	.03	.56**	.67**	.53**		
7 Followership (Critical Behavior)	2.59	0.79	0.89	.03	.06	.33**	.45**	.44**	.60**	
8 Followership(Considerate Behavior)	2.49	0.87	0.89	.03	.03	.35**	.57**	.43**	.64**	.71**

Note: **p<0.01

Table 2. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis to followership.

Variable	Followership (Active Behavior)			Followership (Critical Behavior)			Followership (Considerate Behavior)		
	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model1	Model2	Model3
Gender (1 : Female)	0.04	-0.01	0.01	0.03	0.00*	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.03
Years of Service (1: 0-4 years, 2: 5-9 years, 3: 10-14 years, 4: 15-19 years, 5: 20-24 years, 6: 25-29 years, 7: more than 30 years)	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.01	0.00	0.01
Affective Commitment		0.56***	0.20***		0.33	0.05		0.35***	-0.02
Solution-Focused Communication			0.42***			0.25**			0.47***
Problem-Focused Communication			0.22***			0.28***			0.18**
Adjust R ²	-0.01	0.31***	0.50***	0.03*	0.13***	0.26***	0.02*	0.14***	0.34***
F value	0.31	31.12***	46.32***	3.38*	11.13***	17.13***	2.86*	12.19***	24.47***

Notes: ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05; VIF<2.304

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficient, and reliability coefficient for each variable used in this research. We measured the reliability of the scale based on the two-factor model of solution-focused management and the three-factor model of followership. We confirmed the sufficient reliability of each scale. Thus, we considered that each measurement scale ensured a certain degree of internal consistency. Therefore, we decided to use the mean value of the items comprising each factor as the variable score for subsequent analyses. The reliability coefficient results also confirm that the

measurement scale for solution-focused management developed by Kitai (2020) is sufficiently reliable in this research. Finally, we used multiple regression to test our hypothesis 1 (Table 2). The results of the analysis showed that solution-focused/problem-focused communication, or solution-focused management, had a positive influence on followership (active behavior). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. In addition, solution-focused management influences all dimensions of followership. Thus, solution-focused management was shown to be an independent variable of followership. We also confirmed that collinearity was ruled out, as the VIF values were under 2.304. A t-test was performed to test hypothesis 2. The results showed that followers were more likely to engage in followership behavior (critical behavior) ($t(211) = 3.02, p < 0.01$) and followership (considerate behavior) ($t(211) = 2.93, p < 0.01$) when their managers were non-Japanese (Table 3). However, there was no statistically significant difference in followership (active behavior). Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Table 3. T-test for differences in the nationality of the manager.

		Followership (Active behavior)		Followership (Critical behavior)		Followership (Considerate behavior)	
		Mean	t value	Mean	t value	Mean	t value
Manager's Nationality	Japanese	2.94	-0.66	2.51	-3.02**	2.40	-2.93**
	Non-Japanese	3.00		2.83		2.74	

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$

6. Discussion

6.1. Discussion of study 1

Solution-focused communication promotes positive emotions and suppresses negative emotions by finding solutions to problems. It also enhances self-efficacy in problem solving. Furthermore, solution-focused communication has the effect of promoting further solution-focused communication statements (Kitai et al., 2017). Many followers have high levels of positive emotions and problem-solving self-efficacy in workplaces where are taken solution-focused communication. As a result, followers may be more likely to take positive action.

6.2. Discussion of study 2

We would like to discuss the results of Hypothesis 2 from the perspective of organizational socialization. Chao et al. (1994) presented the following 6 dimensions of learning content for recruits as direct and primary outcomes of organizational socialization. 1) Politics, 2) History 3) Relationships 4) Organizational goals and values 5) Language 6) Job proficiency. Non-managerial position of Japanese followers were not necessarily newcomers in this survey, but they may undergo more organizational socialization if they have non-Japanese managers. Japanese followers with foreign managers may be learning new 2) history and 4) organizational goals and values in the process of organizational socialization. As Komatsu and Kougo (2013) stated, because of the clear goal setting and division of roles, open communication, and positive feedback provided by foreign managers, Japanese followers may have experienced new organizational socialization, and by adapting to it, they may have increased their organizational commitment and become highly satisfied with their job. As a result, Japanese followers may have taken more followership behaviors.

6.3. Practical implications

The practical implications of the above research results are two points. First, each department should attempt to share the organizational goals it has permeated with all organizational members. Second, organizational development based on solution-focused management should be implemented. The content of communication in the workplace is intended to develop an organization that prioritizes solution-focused communication over problem-focused communication. These are expected to elicit more followership behavior from followers.

6.4. Limitations and future research direction

The limitations and future research direction of this research are described in five points. First, there was a bias in the personal attributes of the data collected. Only 71 (26.0%) of $N = 273$ Japanese followers had a foreign manager. For this reason, the results of this research can't be discussed by applying them to all Japanese workers immediately. Second, this research only analyzes the relationship between the nationality of the manager and the followership behavior of Japanese followers from an empirical aspect. This research didn't provide any background or mechanism as to why the nationality of the manager makes a difference in the followership behavior of Japanese followers. Therefore, further analysis from both empirical and qualitative perspectives is needed. Third, this research didn't take into account the manager's leadership. When comparing the followership behavior of Japanese followers

across nationalities of their managers, we should consider the manager's leadership in the future. Fourth, this research analyzed the results of the followers' responses. Future research should examine the followership behavior of followers as seen by their leader. Fifth, we can't determine how goal sharing should be done. For example, it is not possible to determine whether it is more effective to share goals in a concrete or abstract way, or whether it is more effective to share both at the same time. Future research will also need to be conducted on the methods and frequency of goal sharing by leaders.

References

- Chao, G. T., O'Leary-Kelly, A. M., Wolf, S., Klein, H. J., & Gardner, P. D. (1994). Organizational socialization: Its content and consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(5), 730-743. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.79.5.730>
- Crossman, B., & Crossman, J. (2011) Conceptualizing followership: a review of the literature. *Leadership*, 7(4), 481-497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715011416891>
- Ehrhart, M., & Klein, K. (2001). Predicting followers' preferences for charismatic leadership: the influence of follower values and personality. *Leadership Quarterly*, 12(2), 153-179. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(01\)00074-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00074-1)
- Herdian, H., Ridwan, R., Rias, T., Usastiawaty, C. I., Sulpakar, S. M., Arifki, Z., Sudjarwo, S., Hasan, H., & Albet, M. (2022). Literature Review of Followership as Independent and Dependent Variables and the Meaning. *International Journal of Education and Information Technologies*, 16, 92-100. <https://doi.org/10.46300/9109.2022.16.10>
- Kitai, A. (2014). *Organizational culture enhancing learning: multi-level approach*. Yuhikaku Publishing.
- Kitai, A., Suzuki, R., Uenoyama, T., & Matsumoto, Y. (2017). Quantitative study on the effectiveness of solution-focused management - Influence on proactive behavior at automobile dealers. *Discussion Paper Series at Kobe University*, 2017-20.
- Kitai, A. (2020). A Development of Solution/Problem-Focused Communication Scale in Workplace – A Preliminary Analysis. *Konan Business Review*, 61(1-2), 59-92. <https://konan-u.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/3686>
- Komatsu, E., & Kougo, C. (2013). Influence of Foreign Superiors that Affect Thoughts and Behavioral Transformation of Japanese Subordinates. *The Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Japanese Psychological Association*, p. 21.
- Matsuyama, K. (2016). Three-dimensional model of followership behavior. *Kinki University journal of business and economics*, 63(2), 37-64.
- Matsuyama, K., & Mori, Y. (2022). Followership behavior and psychological safety. *The Association of Social Studies, Doshisha University*, 141, 31-48. <https://doshisha.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/28944>
- Matsuyama, K., Shiratsuki, M., & Nakayama, K. (2023). The influence of servant leadership and the big five personality trait factors on followership behavior. *The Association of Social Studies, Doshisha University*, 145, 19-38. <https://doshisha.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/29695>
- Nishinobo, M. & Furuta, K. (2013). Exploratory Research on the Elements of Japanese-style Followership and a Study Concerning the Differences between Personal Characteristics of Japanese Followership. *Management development*, 16(2), 65-75.
- Nishinobo, M. (2014). An Empirical Study of the Influence of Followership and Leadership to LMX: Focusing on the Behavior of Followers. *Management development*, 17(2), 23-31.
- Nishinobo, M. (2015a). An Empirical Study of the Relationship between Followership and Results in Japanese Companies. *Management development*, 18(2), 41-50.
- Nishinobo, M. (2015b). *Followership in Japanese Organizations: An Examination of Followership Content and Outcomes* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Nishinobo, M. (2022). Relationship between nurses' followership and personal characteristics – Quantitative analysis focusing on gender, job position, and years of nurse experience. *Journal of business administration and information*, 29(1-2), 119-129. <https://setsunan.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/1446>
- Nishinobo, M. (2023). How A Chief Nurse's Leadership and Key Person Relate to Nurses' Followership. *Journal of business administration and information*, 30(1-2), 1-16. <https://setsunan.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/1511>
- Persol Research and Consulting (2019). *Report on the Results of a Quantitative Survey on the Work Burden of Middle Management*. Persol Research and Consulting.
- Tanoff, G. F., & Barlow, C. B. (2002) Leadership and followership: Same animal, different spots? *Consulting Psychology Journal Practice and Research*, 54(3), 157-167. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/1061-4087.54.3.157>
- Uhl-Bien, M., Riggio, R. E., Lowe, K. B., & Carsten, M. K. (2013). Followership theory: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25, 83-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.007>