

Mastering Organizational Structure for Building Followership: A Strategy for Transitioning Managers into Leaders

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How to cite this paper: Oyinlade, A. O. (2025). Mastering Organizational Structure for Building Followership: A Strategy for Transitioning Managers into Leaders. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 13, 4178-4201. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2025.136225>

Received: September 10, 2025

Accepted: November 17, 2025

Published: November 20, 2025

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Abstract

Given that leadership has been widely accepted in research as the process of influencing others to accomplish goals without resorting to managerial techniques and reliance on position authority, it becomes imperative for leader-aspiring managers to learn how to gain such influence. Consistent with the claims of previous studies on leadership, this study asserts that the ability to influence others to accomplish tasks is based on effective interpersonal relationships between managers and their subordinates that culminate in the transformation of subordinates into followers and managers into leaders. This study further asserts that the mastery of an organizational structure can be harnessed through effective human relations to build a followership. In doing so, well-knowledgeable managers can use their knowledge of organizational structure to enhance employee success, career development, upward mobility, and avoidance of negative organizational sanctions. Consequently, these beneficial outcomes of applying knowledge of organizational structure will aid employees in their transition from subordinates to followers and in recognizing managers as leaders. Therefore, it will be beneficial for managers to gain a deep understanding of their organizational structures and effectively apply this knowledge to benefit their subordinates.

Keywords

Leadership, Leadership Behavior, Unit Leader, Organizational Structure, Building Followership, Followership

1. Introduction

Leadership in organizations is a widely discussed concept that has generated sig-

nificant interest from scholars, corporate executives, corporate trainers, and students alike. Authors such as [Peters and Austin \(1985\)](#), [Bennis and Nanus \(2007\)](#), and [Drucker \(1995\)](#), among others, have emphasized the need for leaders over managers in American corporations, citing the greater likelihood that leaders achieve higher employee productivity and organizational commitment than managers. Consensus about the ability of leaders to be high-achieving rests primarily in their use of influence rather than reliance on managerial authority and protocols in getting workers to achieve unit goals. Unlike managers who rely on the authorized power invested in their position by organizational bureaucracy, leaders use the influence granted to them through the endorsed power vested in them by their followers ([Barnard, 1938](#); [Etzioni, 1965](#)). This means that being a leader means having followers. As explained by [Oyinlade \(2025\)](#), leaders' followers are decidedly different from managers' subordinates. An organization's bureaucracy assigns subordinate status and roles based on an individual's location within the organizational structure ([Bertocci, 2009](#)). "The organizational structure itself places a manager over the followers or employees, so they have little or no alternative but to comply with a manager's orders and directives" ([Bertocci, 2009](#): p. 10).

The status and location of subordinates compel them to report to a particular manager and perform as demanded by that manager. Subordinates are an unavoidable and necessary part of a manager's span of control. By organizational design, subordinates are expected to carry out the manager's instructions as orders that they must obey. This is the outcome of a traditional organizational hierarchy that structures the relationship between managers and their subordinates as a simple chain of obedience to managerial authority. But being a follower is different. The decision to become a follower is not a passive one, as workers exercise personal agency in making this choice. Becoming a follower is not an automatic response to managerial authority but a deliberate social psychological process, shaped by a manager's ability to foster trust, demonstrate fairness, and create an environment of psychological safety. The assessment of fairness may be derived from perceptions of the manager's practice of interactional justice, whereby subordinates see the manager as relating well and fairly to them ([Zhang et al., 2023](#)). This means subordinates have a choice in becoming followers, because if they have no choice in the matter and must risk punitive actions for not obeying the manager, the situation becomes one of domination and intimidation rather than followership ([Bertocci, 2009](#)).

The decision to follow may also be based on the interpretation of the manager as practicing procedural justice through involvement of the subordinates in unit decision-making. According to [Lee et al. \(2024\)](#), inclusive decision-making positively influences subordinates' proactive performance by enhancing their psychological ownership and consequently fostering their decision to become followers. That is, when subordinates regularly participate in planning and problem-solving, such a situation nurtures an environment in which choosing to be-

come a follower is generated by a decision to invest in a cause in which one feels a part, rather than simply executing a top-down order. This was accentuated in the project by Lee et al. (2024), which showed that the decision to follow is powerfully shaped by the subordinate's sense of psychological ownership; the feeling that the group's mission and outcomes are their own when they participate in crafting group decisions. This underscores the importance of having agency in the decision to become a follower, as subordinates who experience agency are more likely to endorse and sustain leaders who enable their sense of ownership (Baird & Benson, 2022; Jun & Lee, 2023). Transiting from subordinate to follower is therefore determined by a conscious and voluntary discretion of workers when managers are perceived as fair, trustworthy, and deserving of being followed. This suggests that the choice to follow is a reciprocal response to being treated justly, transforming a transactional reporting line into a high-quality, trusting relationship.

Ultimately, a follower in a command group is a subordinate who has voluntarily transformed into a follower upon a personal discretionary determination that the manager has earned the privilege of being followed as a leader based on his/her positive relations with the subordinates (see Oyinlade, 2025). As a follower, the worker willingly and voluntarily aligns his/her personal interests with those of the leader. The follower also freely and enthusiastically grants the leader endorsed power of influence and is willing to perform beyond merely meeting the job expectations that typify subordinates' performance under managerial authority (Etzioni, 1965). Followers willingly and voluntarily go beyond the call of duty to produce extraordinary performance, not because of rewards or due to coercion, but purely due to affective reverence for the person of the leader (rather than the office the person occupies).

Given that followership is voluntary, and it is the followers who confer leadership on managers, both the statuses of leader and follower are informal (Oyinlade, 2025). A leader is able to influence followers to raise their performance to extraordinary levels and self-actualize in the absence of promises of extra rewards as incentives and the threat of punishments (Oyinlade, 2025). This implies that becoming a leader requires acquiring and applying leadership competencies in relating to subordinates. It is through the practice of leadership competencies that subordinates transform into followers and consequently make the manager their leader (Oyinlade, 2025). A review of the literature reveals a wealth of information on leadership competencies that can transform subordinates into effective followers. Such literature includes, but is not limited to, Oyinlade (2025), Vasilescu (2019), Sinek (2017), Ajuwon and Oyinlade (2016), Stein (2016), Bennis and Nanus (2007), Oyinlade (2006), Oyinlade and Gellhaus (2005), Oyinlade et al. (2003), Stogdill (1974), and Conger (1992). These studies (among others) specify various leadership competencies that managers should acquire to become leaders in the eyes of their subordinates who have become followers; however, these studies typically do not specify how to acquire those competencies.

2. The Present Study

As mentioned above, a dearth of knowledge exists regarding the human relations behaviors that managers should practice to acquire leadership competencies, despite the huge amount of available literature on the topic. Books on leadership tend to offer inspirational ideas about leadership and encourage managers to become leaders, but without specifying a clear pathway or a specific, scientifically and logically well-reasoned behavioral guide as a roadmap to becoming a leader, despite extolling the virtues of leadership. This report aims to contribute knowledge to the roadmap for managers to become leaders by building their followership through the mastery of their organizational structure. This is because organizational structure matters. As a form of social structure, it provides consistent and predictable outcomes that serve as the basis for all organizational realities (Oyinlade et al., 2020; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Therefore, a good understanding of organizational structure has the potential to enhance managers' ability to become leaders by building followership among their subordinates. As Oyinlade (2025) indicated, it is when subordinates become followers that they bestow the leader status on their manager through their willingness to expand their zone of indifference and raise their performance to extraordinary levels. This means that managers who wish to become leaders must first engage in affective interpersonal human relations that convert subordinates into followers.

This study takes the position that a good understanding of organizational structure and the effective application of this knowledge to enhance subordinates' personal and collective unit successes will facilitate the transformation of subordinates into effective followers. This study asserts that managers can use the knowledge of their organizational structure to gain followers. This aspect of leadership has been mostly overlooked in studies, yet it is crucial knowledge to have and apply effectively to become a leader in an organization. This study is designed to provide a much-needed pathway or roadmap for how managers can use their knowledge of organizational structure to build a followership among workers and consequently become leaders. It is designed to provide a systematic and logically reasoned knowledge of organizational structure and how managers could harness the knowledge to convert their subordinates into followers.

3. Understanding Organizational Structure

3.1. What Is an Organizational Structure?

An organizational structure is a type of social structure. A social structure comprises the formal and informal social designs, social arrangements, or social agreements that guide human behaviors and determine all social conditions (Macionis, 2017; Oyinlade et al., 2020). An organizational structure is a social structure that exists specifically inside organizations. Just as general societal social structures shape human behaviors and conditions in society at large, organizational structures shape the behavior and conditions of organizational members. Tolbert and

Hall (2016: p. 27) defined it as the “arrangement of organizational parts.” Although this definition covers the essence of organizational structure, it captures only a narrow scope of organizational design. Another definition of organizational structure, as proposed by sociologist Peter Blau, states that an organizational structure is “the distributions, along various lines, of people among social positions that influence the role relations among these people” (Blau, 1974: p. 12). In other words, an organizational structure represents how people are distributed vertically and horizontally within an organization, based on their job positions and the influence these positions have on their relationships with one another. Blau’s definition emphasizes relationships among organizational members based on their jobs and locations within an organization. While this definition is good, it seems clumsy and requires careful thought to understand.

By blending ideas from both Tolbert and Hall (2016) and Blau (1974) with the description of components of a group structure by Oyinlade et al. (2020), I advance a new definition of organizational structure as *the formal arrangement of the division of labor that incorporates expected relationships among organizational positions and units, guided by organizational norms, for effective and efficient accomplishments of organizational goals*. This definition encompasses the arrangement of organizational parts, as described by Pamela Tolbert and Richard Hall (2016), role relationships, as outlined by Peter Blau (1974), and the importance of group norms, as emphasized by Oyinlade et al. (2020), to provide a comprehensive picture of an organizational structure. The definition shows that the ultimate purpose of an organizational structure is the effective and efficient accomplishment of organizational goals through a design of labor relations among workers and the observance of rules, implying that organizational members cannot just behave as they wish. Their behaviors and expected behaviors must conform to the rules of their unit and organization.

A formal organizational structure can also be described by its *complexity* (the arrangement of organizational parts), *formalization* (the extent and enforcement of organizational rules), *standardization* (the extent of precision and tolerance in work outcomes), and *centralization* (the extent and pattern of the distribution of authority) (see Tolbert & Hall, 2016). This implies that the formal organizational structure embodies an organization’s formal bureaucracy, which is an organization’s layout or design for how each organizational activity, in a step-by-step value-added order, leads to the accomplishment of organizational goals (Weber, 1947). Without a formal bureaucracy, an organization cannot exist, nor can it achieve its goals. This relationship between an organizational structure and its formal bureaucracy is an integral one, in which both coexist and are, therefore, mutually interchangeable. That is, an organizational structure can be described as an organizational bureaucracy and vice versa.

So far, the definitions and descriptions of an organizational structure primarily reflect the formal type; however, the informal structure is also important for understanding the realities of an organization (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 2003). To

this effect, attention will also be given to the informal structure in this study.

3.2. Examining Organizational Structure

An examination of an organizational structure may begin with the description of the division of labor within an organization. This means that the goals of an organization are broken down into multiple sub-parts or jobs, which are arranged in a particular order to accomplish the goals (Fayol, 2013; Weber, 1947). This arrangement is both horizontal and vertical across an organization's structure. The horizontal arrangement describes jobs that are organized to be performed at similar levels of authority, while the vertical arrangement describes jobs that are performed at different authority levels (Gibson et al., 2012). This means that an organizational structure determines the distribution of authority in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. In its vertical dimension, it indicates who is responsible for giving instructions to whom and who reports to whom, thereby specifying expected official manager-subordinate relationships amongst organizational members. Horizontally, it specifies jobs that are performed at the same level of authority (rather than hierarchical) within an organization (Ivancevich et al., 2014; Tolbert & Hall, 2016).

When studying an organizational chart, one is presented with the formal organizational structure. The chart provides managers with an opportunity to learn the formal structural layout of their organization. As a visual representation of organizational structure, an organizational chart shows the formal arrangement of jobs within organizational divisions, which are the largest units within an organization (Gibson et al., 2012). Examples of divisions in a manufacturing organization may include production, human resources, marketing, public relations, research and development, and legal. At Goldman Sachs, one of the largest and most successful investment firms in the United States, the major divisions listed on the corporation's website are global banking and markets, assets and wealth management, platform solutions, and research and perspectives, in addition to twelve subdivisions across the four major divisions (Goldman Sachs Web Page, 2025). The number of major divisions in any organization primarily depends on the organization's size and goals. The larger the size and goals, the larger the number of needed divisions. Alternatively, a reverse hypothesis suggests that the larger the number of divisions and goals, the larger the size of an organization. This is the chicken-and-egg dilemma of organizational size and its predictors; however, this debate falls outside the scope of this study.

Another way to understand the major divisions of an organization is through products. Some organizations create divisions around each of their product lines. This was true of General Motors in the past when it had separate divisions for Chevrolet, Pontiac, and Cadillac vehicles (Taylor, 2006). When an organization uses product departmentalization, all activities necessary to create and market a product are conducted by the departments within each product division. These activities will include research and development, product design, production,

marketing, promotion, advertising, and human resources management, among others. The division will also have an organizational structure that mirrors that of the entire organization, spanning administrative levels from the president to first-line workers. A product divisional structure operates as an independent organization in design (Ivancevich et al., 2014) and typically generates duplications and redundancies, making it less efficient compared to functional departmentalization (Gibson et al., 2012). The inefficiency of product departmentalization led General Motors to eventually abandon it in favor of a functional departmental design, which aggregates labor based on organizational functions and personnel specialization (Taylor, 2004; Treece et al., 1992). This design enables the creation of various areas, such as research and development, design, production and manufacturing, marketing and sales, accounting and finance, and human resources.

Whether functional, product, or any other form of departmentalization is adopted, the departments within each division will comprise different work groups and teams depending on organizational design. Each job within each department or specific workgroup is designed to make specific contributions to the accomplishment of assigned goals for the particular unit and the overall organizational mission. This means each job position has specific responsibilities that must be accomplished by the person occupying the position. In addition, organizational, divisional, departmental, and possibly team rules and policies apply to each job position and how jobs are to be conducted. The behavior of the occupier of each position will, therefore, be dictated by the job responsibilities of each position as well as the rules that apply to each specific position. Three other aspects of an organizational structure are also important to fully understand if one hopes to transform management into leadership. They are centralization, formalization, and standardization.

Centralization is one of the principles of management introduced by Henri Fayol. It is a measure of the extent of authority distribution or delegation in an organization (Fayol, 2013). Typically, every organizational position is assigned a specific level of authority for completing tasks. For management positions, such authority includes decision-making. Depending on the location of a position within an organizational structure, as well as the general authority distribution design, the amount of decision-making authority varies by position and position level in an organization. Hence, high centralization indicates that organizational authority for decision-making is concentrated at or near the top management positions within an organization. This also implies low delegation. Conversely, authority may be widely distributed throughout an organization, creating a high delegation environment (Ivancevich, 2014; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Typically, when organizations have a low centralization (i.e., high delegation), they tend to have many vertical management positions, resulting in tall organizational structures and a complex process or distribution of authority to each level (Benton, 1998; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). According to Fayol, organizational authority should be distributed to give each management position just the right amount necessary to

complete the tasks of that position. When deciding how much authority should be optimally assigned to each management position and, consequently, determining the extent of centralization, several critical factors are taken into account. They include organizational mission, the size of the organization, the appropriateness of organizational technology, the complexity of the organizational structure, top management's perceptions of workers, the complexity of knowledge needed to perform tasks, and the characteristics of organizational members in terms of education, professional status, skills level, etc. (see Fayol, 2013; Oyinlade, 2025; Oyinlade & Christo, 2020). An analysis of these factors is recommended for understanding authority distribution in organizations, but such an analysis is outside the scope of this study.

Formalization describes the extent to which an organization or any of its divisions and departments subscribe to formal rules and guidelines in conducting work (Gibson et al., 2012; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). It describes the extent to which work is regulated by organizational or, in many cases, governmental regulations. Work processes that are highly regulated are described as highly formalized because they must adhere to a formal process dictated by regulations. Such work cannot be done at the discretion of the worker due to the need for strict adherence to rules. However, for jobs with minimum or no formalization, the worker has discretion in determining work processes (Gibson et al., 2012). The worker is at liberty to determine each step in a job process, including the work processes for accomplishing tasks, when the job has minimal formalization.

Standardization also measures the extent of strictness allowed in an organizational structure. Standardization is the extent to which work outcomes are specified, and the extent of acceptable tolerance (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Tolerance is the extent to which job outcomes, such as products in manufacturing or the balance sheet in accounting, are allowed to depart from established standards. An accountant must balance the ledger to a precise industry standard. Precision is required in the ledger such that a single penny cannot be left missing. Such standardization can also be found in machine and tooling jobs. The piston that goes into the engine of an automobile must be of a precise size, and the wrench is manufactured to be of specific calibration. If the piston and the wrench are allowed to depart from specified measurements, such tolerance is typically extremely small.

4. Harness Organizational Structure to Build Followership

The premise of this study is that the knowledge of organizational structure matters, and it is imperative to fully know an organization's structure if a manager is to become a leader within it. Below are specific areas of knowledge of organizational structure that leader-aspiring managers can harness as a regular behavior to build followership among subordinates.

4.1. Organizational Structure as Context for Organizational Realities

Just as the structure of a house provides the context for all activities in the house,

and a social structure serves as the basis for all societal realities (Macionis, 2017; Merton, 1968; Oyinlade et al., 2020), an organizational structure provides the social context for all realities within an organization (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Everything that occurs in an organization has its foundation in the organization's structure (Gibson et al., 2012; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). This may include employee motivation, job satisfaction, employee turnover, job performance, organizational commitment, employee-employee conflicts, and employee-management conflicts, among others.

The range of organizational outcomes or realities is extensive, and they all stem from organizational structure. Essentially, an organizational structure is a social technology. It is transformational in its effects, like any other technology. Through its organizational structure, a company transforms labor and material resources into products and services. As social technology, an organizational structure, coupled with machine technology, facilitates job performance and shapes the behaviors of organizational members (Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999).

Understanding how an organizational structure works and its impact on member behavior is an essential leadership skill. A substantial knowledge of organizational structure is required to effectively organize the workplace for optimal employee performance. It is a knowledge that enables the manager to understand the potential consequences of current organizational arrangements and to learn how to make structural adjustments that facilitate effective employee performance. The better a manager understands the nuances of organizational structure, the more effectively he/she can utilize this knowledge to design an organizational environment that fosters employee success through high job performance, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, low stress, and reduced interpersonal employee dysfunctional conflicts. Creating such a work environment will promote employee satisfaction with the manager and contribute to transforming subordinates into followers and managers into leaders.

4.2. Mitigating Structural Constraints for Performance Effectiveness

An important leadership behavior that can transform subordinates into followers is helping them (subordinates) perform effectively in their roles. The better a manager is able to provide effective guidance to subordinates in their job activities and improve their performance, the greater the likelihood that the subordinates will invest in such a manager and be influenced by him/her. To become a leader requires understanding organizational structure to know how to appropriately intervene and provide the necessary support for subordinates who are experiencing structural constraints in their jobs. Recognizing how organizational structures and systems impact workers begins with a good understanding of structures and systems. This knowledge will enhance the manager's ability to anticipate the sources of structural constraints that may negatively impact the effectiveness of subordinates. Armed with such knowledge, the manager will be able to determine how to support subordinates in becoming effective and efficient in their jobs.

4.3. Structural Factors of Entrance as a Factor of Job Performance

An important factor that is easily overlooked when analyzing job performance is the entrance of new members into an organizational unit. No one becomes part of an organization without going through an admission process. This is the gate that is structurally designed to determine who is allowed to join an organization and who should be shut out. Not everyone can or will be admitted into any organization. The entrance procedure includes the social wall that every organization erects to select its members based on its preferred membership requisites and keep others out. Being an organizational member implies meeting all general and any specialized qualifications needed to perform effectively in an organization. It is on the basis of vetted qualifications that organizational members are deemed suitable to legitimately enter an organization through the social door.

Unfortunately, it is at the entrance point that ineffective performance typically begins, as many organizations open their doors and allow people with inadequate qualifications to enter. The admission process is designed to identify and eliminate non-qualified candidates for each position being filled, ensuring that newly admitted members can perform organizational functions effectively and efficiently upon completion of their training. The admissions process into an organization should allow only those with the most personal resources, in terms of knowledge, skills, competencies, and the right mental fortitude, to succeed in entering the organization. If this does not happen, the effective and efficient performance of the organization will be compromised. This is why it is essential to pay attention to the organizational bureaucracy involved in the employee selection process. This responsibility falls on the shoulders of managers who admit workers into an organization, as well as those who accept workers into particular units. Training managers may also play a crucial role in the selection process by ensuring that every new employee entering an organization and those transitioning into other positions within the organization are well-qualified for the positions they will occupy.

It is essential to recognize that employing poorly qualified candidates is a structural and bureaucratic failure, rather than an individual hiring manager's failure. Managers who employ underqualified candidates do so because the organizational structure makes it possible. The organizational structure (mainly centralization) allows it. It may be that the job requirements (mainly standardization) are ambiguous or poorly communicated to the hiring manager, resulting in poor employee selection. The hiring manager may also be unqualified to properly assess the qualifications of candidates because he or she has been promoted to his or her level of incompetence, consistent with the Peter Principle (Peter & Hall, 1969).

The lesson here is that a step toward building a followership is prudence in new employee selection, as well as understanding the roles of organizational structure and bureaucracy as crucial in this endeavor. When an organizational structure admits poorly qualified candidates, it is a leadership behavior for a manager to intervene and call for a review and revision of policies and processes for entrance

into the organization. It may also help a manager identify areas of poor preparation among those who have been admitted into the organization and design intervention strategies to help them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their performance. By making necessary structural realignments in the organization, a manager will avoid blaming subordinates for their incompetence and instead provide structural solutions that prevent future admissions of unqualified job candidates.

4.4. Mitigating the Consequences of Inadequate Organizational Resources

A manager may also demonstrate leadership behavior by recognizing when organizational resources are inadequate for effective and efficient job performance. While it is essential to enter an organization based on proven personal resources, such as skills, competencies, training, and education, organizational resources are also crucial for effective employee job performance. Organizational resources are environmental resources, as they are not personal or work-related attributes of individual workers. They are the extrinsic resources that an organization should provide to each worker to facilitate effective and efficient job performance (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Depending on the organization, such resources may include equipment, cutting-edge technology, tools, effective training, a competitive compensation package, promotions, office space, an ombudsperson, a cafeteria, automobile parking facilities, recreational facilities, and an on-site medical facility.

Managers who wish to become leaders should be conscious of making necessary organizational resources adequately available to their workers. If resources are not directly within their control, managers should always make good-faith efforts to obtain them. Even when resources appear to be scarce, they should proactively advocate for needed resources rather than offering excuses and apologies for resource deficits or blaming higher-level executives for starving their work groups of resources. It is a leadership behavior to relentlessly mobilize resources, not only those needed to complete tasks, but also those important for employee growth and well-being. This behavior will eventually raise the profile of the manager with the subordinates, and it may lead to greater trust in the manager as a conduit for achieving their (subordinates') personal goals. That is, the act of procuring needed organizational resources will improve the perception of the manager as the path to individual employees' goal attainment, consistent with the assumptions of the Path-Goal Theory (see House, 1971). This perception will invariably contribute to transforming the subordinates into followers.

4.5. Group Dynamics and Job Performance

A strong understanding of organizational structure will enhance a manager's comprehension of work group dynamics and their impact on both individual and group performance. A proper assessment of an employee's performance should include considerations for the group environment in which the employee works.

While personal resources, such as job knowledge, ability, skills, attitude, stress tolerance, and motivation, may affect performance (Kimberly & Rottman, 1987), work group characteristics, including group norms, cohesiveness, and supervision (Kimberly & Rottman, 1987), also deserve consideration in assessing an employee's performance. For example, senior members of a work group may perform better than junior members due to their experience and group norms that may distribute group resources by seniority, thereby placing more resources at the disposal of senior members to facilitate effective performance. Conversely, junior members of a work group may outperform senior members if senior members are fully secure in their jobs and do not have to worry about being laid off, and hence, become complacent and underperform. At the same time, junior members may feel insecure about securing long-term tenure and must compete against one another to achieve high outputs in order to retain their position. Understanding and considering the realities of group and organizational dynamics will benefit all subordinates when managers take these dynamics into account to provide context for performance expectations during performance assessments. Such consideration has the potential to foster affective response to managers and contribute to the conversion of subordinates into followers.

It may also be the case that workers are unclear and confused about their job expectations due to ambiguous role descriptions. This is a structural factor that can negatively impact a worker's performance and contribute to a poor performance evaluation. Emile Durkheim referred to such conditions as anomie, which can lead to poor performance and misbehavior (Durkheim, 1893, 1897; Adler & Laufer, 2020). This is an important reason why managers should regularly review job responsibilities with each worker and clarify any potential ambiguities that the worker may perceive. When managers clearly explain job descriptions and role responsibilities, it will enhance employees' job accomplishments, which will contribute to their job satisfaction and likelihood of being transformed into followers.

Overall, managers need to foster an atmosphere of positive work group dynamics. Regardless of personal resources, negative group dynamics can lower the performance of individuals and the overall group. Understanding the group structural influences on individual behavior is crucial for promoting individual performance and intervening in any group dynamics that can jeopardize an individual's achievements. High-achieving workers are likely to be happy and view their manager as a source of their success when they perceive the manager as fostering positive and supportive group dynamics. This will increase the likelihood that subordinates will become followers.

4.6. Organizational Structure and Effective Communication of Policies

Organizations use official rules, policies, and directives to achieve their goals, but goals do not achieve themselves, and policies do not achieve goals by themselves. People achieve organizational goals. Therefore, rules and policies are not directed

at goals. They are directed at people who work to achieve goals. This reveals that an *organization can be defined as the application of rules, directives, and policies to people in order to achieve specified goals*. From this perspective, understanding organizational structure is crucial for understanding organizational policies. If organizational policies guide employees' behavior in achieving organizational goals, it is crucial for managers to communicate these policies effectively. This requires knowing the sources of policies within the organizational structure and knowing the potential consequences of policy violations.

Policies originate from different levels of an organizational hierarchy, and the consequences for violating them typically vary according to the structural origins of the rules being violated. That is, because organizational authority and instructions are delegated vertically downwards, they carry an impact factor that is mostly associated with their origin in an organizational hierarchy. The taller the structure and the higher the office of the source of a policy, the greater the impact of the policy on organizational members (Benton, 1998). This is a consequence of the greater authority held by higher positions compared to lower positions in an organizational structure. The structural location of the origin of organizational instructions determines the amount of power behind instructions; therefore, instructions from higher levels of an organizational structure are backed by high levels of power (Benton, 1998). The greater the power behind an instruction and the lower the level of the employee who violates it, the greater the likelihood of high consequences. Therefore, the better a manager can communicate instructions and alert subordinates to the potential severity of consequences for violating them, the easier it will be to prevent subordinates from getting into trouble.

Instructions also carry different amounts of urgency and consequences that managers must understand and effectively communicate to their workers. When subordinates are unsure of the expected urgency level in response to a message, they may not respond in a manner that meets the required urgency level, which could have dire consequences for them. Subordinates who bear the unpleasant consequences of not responding with adequate alacrity to urgent instructions, because the manager failed to communicate the urgency of a situation, are unlikely to endorse such a manager for followership. To enhance transforming subordinates into followers, a manager must be skilled at communicating messages with considerations for structural urgency.

4.7. Organizational Structure and Being an Effective Resource Person

As discussed earlier, organizational resources are crucial for effective job performance. Sometimes resources are abundantly allocated to organizational units, but too often, that is not the case, and managers must compete against one another to procure needed resources for their units. In addition, individual workers may request organizational resources to support their personal growth and professional development. Such requested resources may include tuition reimbursement for

higher education, travel expenses to attend professional conferences, bonuses, pay raises, communication devices, tool and software purchases, office desk upgrades, new computers, and office renovations. They may also include additional paid or unpaid vacation time, time off to attend to personal matters without counting as vacation time, and permission to use organizational resources, such as computers and automobiles, for personal activities. The ability to fulfill these requests transforms managers into reliable resource persons to their subordinates. This carries the benefits of trust in the competence of managers to foster employee development and personal goal attainment (see [Lundin et al., 2025](#)). However, to become a resource person requires knowing where resources are located within the structure of an organization, making it imperative for managers to have a thorough understanding of their organization's structure.

The more knowledge managers have about the location of resources, the more likely they are to obtain them for the subordinates who need them. A recent qualitative study by [Lundin et al. \(2025\)](#) examined how first-line managers (FLMs) in Swedish hospitals perceived and implemented the structural conditions of their organizations to support frontline staff. Using focus groups and individual interviews, the researchers found that FLMs acted as critical "resource persons" by making themselves present and available, monitoring staffing and material resources, and translating organizational information into accessible formats for staff. They also facilitated opportunities for professional development by assigning special tasks and encouraging both formal and informal coordinating roles. These practices enhanced access to resources, information, support, and opportunities, which in turn improved staff satisfaction, competence, and engagement. The study highlights the central role of FLMs' knowledge of organizational structure in enabling structural empowerment and fostering a supportive climate for effective patient care and staff development.

Managers who are not fully knowledgeable about their organizational structure will not be aware of the locations of resources and, therefore, will not be effective resource persons for their subordinates. Being a resource person requires knowing the major divisions and departments within an organization, as well as the activities and resources located within each division and department. It is also important to know who has the power to authorize the use of particular resources. Knowing the different decision-makers who control particular resources will make it possible to know who to contact to procure needed resources for subordinates. But it is not enough just to know the location of resources. It is also important, perhaps even crucial, to be connected with the various personnel with the authority to release resources. Being connected with power within an organization is not only beneficial to managers personally, but it also enables them to deliver requested resources to their subordinates in a timely manner, thereby structurally empowering them and enhancing their job satisfaction ([Orgambidez et al., 2024](#)). Managers who deliver a variety of requested resources to meet the diverse interests of their subordinates will gain social capital, which increases the likelihood that

their subordinates will become followers.

4.8. Organizational Structure for Employee Career Development and Commitment

Every organization has its internal labor market, which comprises all the jobs that are potentially open to qualified employees (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). This enables employees the opportunity to apply for new jobs within their own organization's structure, build a career, and remain with the organization rather than seeking employment in other organizations (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Typically, the larger an organization is, the greater the number of jobs within its structure (Oyinlade & Christo, 2020). This means that the potential for upward mobility, an indicator of growth within an organization, is significantly larger in large organizations and departments than in smaller ones (Oyinlade & Christo, 2020; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). It also means that the organization's internal labor market (OILMAT) serves as a basis for long tenure and organizational commitment when organizations fill available jobs internally rather than with outside candidates (see Oyinlade & Christo, 2020).

Information about current and potential future job openings is typically available to managers through internal sources of information networks (Boorman, 1975), and this positions managers with the opportunity to help advance the careers of their subordinates by informing them of OILMAT job openings and even matching them with those jobs. Managers in small organizations will also be in the position to have early knowledge of job openings in their organizations, but their effect in matching workers to jobs may be negated by the high likelihood that their workers would also readily know about the job openings and match themselves to those jobs without the assistance of their managers. This is a likely consequence of the flat organizational structure that typifies small organizations and puts employees relatively closer to sources of information than workers in large and tall organizational structures. The advantage of managerial knowledge of OILMAT in large organizations with multiple divisions and geographic complexity is especially high and beneficial to managers, as it provides them with the opportunity to gain important social capital currency for leadership by enhancing the career growth of their subordinates. This is achieved by connecting their subordinates with internal jobs that offer significant upward mobility. For example, at a large U.S. retail firm studied by Neumark, Zhang, and Ciccarella (2020), internal labor market practices were shown to play a decisive role in retaining high performers. In this organization, managers actively practiced internal promotion (rather than relying on external hires) for sales positions. One district manager leveraged his OILMAT knowledge by regularly identifying top-performing sales associates in his stores who had the potential for management roles. This case illustrates how managerial application of OILMAT knowledge not only advances individual careers but also reinforces organizational commitment. Recent studies confirm that when managers make internal career paths visible and facilitate mo-

bility, employees are more engaged and loyal (Chen et al., 2021; Pak et al., 2023). Furthermore, transparent OILMAT practices support psychological contracts, signaling fairness and organizational investment in employee development (Akhigbe & Onuoha, 2024).

The opportunity for upward mobility (measured as job promotions) carries many benefits, including but not limited to recognizing employee skills and competencies, and stimulating higher job satisfaction, motivation, morale, competitive spirit, and organizational commitment (Njanja et al., 2013; Pearce, 2011; Pousa & Mathieu, 2010) and higher job performance (Puka et al., 2025). These managerially aided benefits of organizational structure will be true, regardless of organizational size, but only when managers take the time to familiarize themselves with the details of the jobs in their organizational structure and the skills and competencies of their subordinates. Without knowledge of both OILMAT and employee competencies, managers will lose the opportunity to effectively contribute to workers' job advancement, career development, and organizational commitment, which could serve as a conduit for gaining affective employee interactions that could enhance the change in employees from subordinate to follower.

The central point here is that helping subordinates advance in an organizational job hierarchy involves regularly looking out for their best interests as a behavioral pattern. It is a demonstration of managers' goodwill to their subordinates as well as a recognition of the subordinates' ability to successfully perform in higher positions within their organization. Managers who are known for helping subordinates move up the career ladder within an organization stand to gain the respect and admiration of their subordinates. Because organizational commitment is target-oriented, workers may also stay with an organization due to their commitment to the managers (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Bloemer & Odekerken-Schroder, 2003; Trimble, 2006), who have aided their career advancement. Such respect and admiration eventually become another basis upon which subordinates convert into followers and simultaneously confer leadership on their managers.

4.9. The Informal Organizational Structure for Solving Problems

In the same manner that knowledge of the formal organizational structure can be used to transform subordinates into followers, the same is true for the informal organizational structure. While the formal structure represents the official design and bureaucracy of an organization (Gibson et al., 2012; Tolbert & Hall, 2016), the informal structure also powerfully shapes organizational realities (Gibson et al., 2012). The informal organizational structure refers to the unofficial network of groups, friendships, and cliques that exist within an organization (Cross & Parker, 2004; Cross & Sproull, 2004; Kratzer et al., 2008). Informal groups typically comprise organizational members of similar power ranks within the same units or command groups, but they can also occur among members of different departments and units. Sometimes, these groups may also include members of different ranks (Ivancevich et al., 2014). These groups typically evolve from informal inter-

actions among organizational members, based on their access to one another through the normal routines of everyday life within their organization. A friendship group may start as a casual encounter in places like the restroom, the cafeteria, or the car park. It may also begin through formal structural arrangements that permit workers to have regular and continuous access to one another (Ivancevich et al., 2014). Friendships formed among workers may later develop into an informal, yet powerful, structure that influences their official job performance. Lessons from the infamous Mayo experiment demonstrate the power of informal organization, as workers developed a strong esprit de corps that altered their job performance due to the attention they received from being studied (Mayo, 1946). The higher employee productivity outcome of the experiment demonstrated the informal ability of workers to become extrinsically incentivized, set work pace, and increase both individual and group performance (Mayo, 1946). It indicates the ability of the informal structure to shape employee performance independently of the formal organizational design, signaling the need for managers not to ignore the informal structure, but instead to recognize its presence and safely participate in it to effectively channel employee energy into achieving official goals. A safe participation is one in which the manager does not become cliquish and engage in preferential treatment of the subordinates due to differential association with them.

Managers may also participate in the informal organization to gain knowledge of interpersonal solidarity as well as incivilities among workers and mitigate against negative behaviors that may have adverse effects on workers. It happens fairly regularly in the workplace that workers engage in oppressive behaviors and interpersonal conflicts, which often produce different forms of incivility, such as avoidance, exclusion, spreading malicious rumors, refusal to share important job-related knowledge, or even sabotaging one another's work (Brazzel, 2003a). In some cases, an employee may be quietly mobbed by others. In professional environments, mobbing can take the form of collective undermining of colleagues or en bloc voting against another member (Brazzel, 2003a; Brazzel, 2003b; Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Managers who maintain informal ties with their subordinates will be aware of internal conflicts within their command groups and when incivility is directed at individual group members. Managers who participate in the informal organizational structure, by maintaining informal ties with their subordinates, will have an insider knowledge of incivilities and be able to intervene early to stop them by instituting effective corrective measures.

Understanding the informal structure well will also help managers with team-building and motivation strategies for performance improvement and organizational change (Barchiesi et al., 2008; Bryan et al., 2007). Both team building and motivation require a fair amount of personal understanding of workers. By gaining and maintaining informal ties with their subordinates, managers will gain knowledge of their (subordinates) interests and desires. Managers will also be aware of the informal structure of interactions among subordinates, thereby un-

derstanding the patterns of influence among them. Managers can use this knowledge to bond with leading influencers among the subordinates and encourage them to help build strong teams by uniting subordinates around their common interests and unit goals. When a change becomes necessary within an organization or a command group, managers will also benefit from utilizing their insider knowledge of informal relationships among workers to deploy their leading influencers and convince the rest of the team to adopt the change (Gibson et al., 2012). Additionally, because motivation requires knowing the unsatisfied needs of workers (Maslow, 2013; Taormina & Gao, 2013), ties with the informal structure of a command group will enable managers to recognize those needs and create the necessary structural opportunities to fulfill them.

5. Conclusion

Overall, mastering organizational structure will help managers facilitate their subordinates' job satisfaction, motivation, career development, and commitment to the organization. Central to this essay is the recognition of the importance of thoroughly understanding organizational structure and the need to translate such knowledge into human relations competencies that will encourage subordinates to become followers and transform their managers into leaders. A manager's mastery of organizational structure can improve the quality of job performance and facilitate individual achievements. Additionally, this mastery can be used to prevent subordinates from violating organizational policies and avoid negative organizational sanctions, thereby contributing to a positive perception of the manager as worthy of followership.

Understanding an organization and its basis for effective and efficient job performance requires knowing the organization's formal structure. Also, knowing how things happen unofficially is to understand an organization's informal structure. Therefore, to comprehensively know an organization is to know its formal and informal structures. As discussed in this report, an organization's structure is the basis for all organizational realities. Nothing happens in an organization that does not have its roots in organizational structure. In fact, even things that do not happen in an organization do not happen because of the organization's structure, because organizational structure can prevent certain things from occurring. Hence, organizational structures are both prescriptive and proscriptive. Depending on how an organization is designed, its organizational structure can either enhance or hinder organizational outcomes and the actions of its members. Unfortunately, despite its pervasive influence in shaping organizational realities, an organizational structure and its outcomes can often be overlooked, dismissed, or misunderstood. However, managers who fully understand their organization's structure can use this knowledge to act in ways that transform their subordinates into effective followers.

The essence of this report is to demonstrate how managers can utilize their knowledge of organizational structure to build followership among their subordi-

nates. Being followed requires behaving in ways that will impress subordinates well enough to be willing to expand their zones of indifference. Managers who understand organizational structure and apply their knowledge to enhance the performance and achievements of their subordinates will increase their chances of converting their subordinates into followers. When subordinates need career-building information, a manager with a good knowledge of the internal labor market within an organizational structure will be able to provide effective career growth counseling. When instructions require rapid attention and a specified quality of performance, the manager who understands the sources of instructions within an organizational structure is well-positioned to relay them effectively, thereby preventing undesirable consequences for subordinates. Additionally, having a good understanding of organizational structure will enhance the likelihood that managers will hire the right workers for available positions within their command groups. An unqualified worker in a command group may create many undesirable consequences, including disunity among group members. Managers who understand the role of organizational structure in preventing the entrance of unqualified workers into their command groups will be able to prevent unwanted consequences of incompetence and its domino effect.

Understanding the informal structure enables managers to possess the necessary inside knowledge of what is happening within their command groups. They will gain knowledge on how workers may informally set work pace, abuse one another, unite with one another, or be motivated by one another. Managers who are well-connected with the informal activities of their command groups will know the kind of information that workers exchange at the water cooler. Managers who understand the informal group structure can readily prevent the structure from hindering the performance of group members and from any incivility that may occur within the group. They will be well-positioned to utilize this knowledge to alleviate fears, prevent incivility, foster strong teams, create a motivating environment, and maintain task completion at a preferred pace. Actualizing these things through the informal structure will significantly contribute to a manager's profile as worthy of being followed when combined with other leadership behaviors that the manager may also practice on a regular basis.

Ultimately, managers who understand their organizational structure are well-positioned to enhance the growth of their subordinates. They will be able to utilize their knowledge of organizational structure to enhance the job outcomes of their subordinates, thereby increasing their overall satisfaction. When subordinates are happy, they are more likely to respect, love, and admire their manager, which promotes trust and followership, consequently transforming the manager into a leader.

While this study focuses on the application of mastering organizational structure in building followership and becoming a unit leader, it does not claim that such practice is the only way to become a leader. Arguments can be made for the application of other leadership competencies and behaviors that managers can

adopt to build their followership and gain the status of a leader. They include, but not limited to competencies such as leader self-awareness and authenticity (Bracht et al., 2021; Baquero, 2023; Kleynhans et al., 2022), relational humility and supportive interpersonal skills (Kleynhans et al., 2022), inspirational (transformational) communication & visioning (Jun & Lee, 2023), individualized consideration and power development (Kragt & Day, 2020; Bracht et al., 2021), building trust through fair processes and competence (Kleynhans et al., 2022; Baquero, 2023), practicing organizational justice (Oyinlade, 2025), enabling followers' agency to promote self-leadership and proactive behaviors (Baird & Benson, 2022; Jun & Lee, 2023), and status management and legitimacy cues (Kragt & Day, 2020). This suggests that building a followership requires more than just mastering one competency.

As mentioned by Oyinlade (2025), no single competence shapes workers' behaviors independently of other competencies and behaviors. Therefore, to build followership and attain leader status, managers should cultivate and routinely practice these skills as a set of interlocking competencies, rather than as isolated, independent behaviors. And, while this study acknowledges organizational structure as the main source of organizational realities, caution is in order regarding the negative side of this reality, which may serve as potential limitations or negative outcomes of this strategy. For example, a manager's deep knowledge of structure could be used for manipulation, or an overemphasis on structure could inadvertently reinforce bureaucratic rigidity, which in turn becomes counterproductive to a manager's efforts at gaining followership among his/her subordinates.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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