

FOLLOWERSHIP RESILIENCE IN ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The study explores followership resilience in three Bulgarian municipalities. Its purpose is twofold: first, to draw the attention of researchers and managers on followership resilience, and second, to explore proactivity and trust as factors of followership resilience in administrative structures. The study is based on a qualitative approach, and uses a combination of two research strategies – exploratory and descriptive. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews with a sample of 35 municipal employees (10.2% from the general population). Followership resilience is analyzed by means of followers' psychological readiness to participate in the decision-making process and to trust superiors. Four types of followers are identified and strengths and weaknesses of each type are discussed. The preference of the majority of interviewees (69%) to follow instructions and not to trust leaders is interpreted. It is concluded that the formula for successful followership resilience in terms of proactivity and trust involves achieving balance and coherence.

Keywords: follower, followership resilience, proactivity, trust, administrative structure, public administration.

1. Introduction

Scholars' interest in followership has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the 21st century (Bligh, 2011). A growing number of academic and business publications recognize that without followers there can be no leaders (Collinson, 2006), and that it is the followers rather than the traditional leaders who make things happen in today's organizations (Mullen, 2016). However, research on followership still lags behind leadership studies: only 8% of all articles published in *The Leadership Quarterly* at the end of 2017 used the term 'follower' (or a derivative) in their title, compared to 83% that used the term 'leader' (Bastardoz and Van Vugt, 2019). According to Bligh (2011), the concept of followership is entering the second stage of conceptual development, one of evaluation, critical reviews, and augmentation (Reichers and Schneider, 1990).

Another new and growing concept in management research is organizational resilience. In times of global pandemic and economic collapse research on opportunities that strengthen organizational capabilities to respond quickly and adapt to adverse changes in the external environment is becoming particularly relevant (Duchek, 2020). It is up to science to take the lead and to suggest new strategies and approaches to resource efficiency by trying to identify opportunities that organizations either do not recognize or underestimate. It is in this context that followership comes into play.

Although there are some preliminary indications that followership can play an important role in the development of organizational resilience (e.g., Andersson, 2018; Eriksson, 2018; Andersson *et al.*, 2019), the relationship between the two constructs remains unclear. Tengblad (2018, p. 39) stresses the importance of constructive followership as part of the organizational social resources, and states the 'need of taking a holistic perspective in decision-making and the ability to act swift, agile and imaginatively for preventing crises and to exploit opportunities'. Similarly, Cruickshank (2020) contends that employees need to be resilient and proactive to improve organizational resilience.

Past research on employee resilience suffers from a lack of conceptual and methodological clarity (Britt *et al.*, 2016). Most publications refer to employee resilience as an individual capacity (Luthans, 2002; Bonanno, 2004), trait (Fredrickson, 2003) or ability (Smith *et al.*, 2008). Individual factors concerning mental and physical health reactions to stress after adverse external challenges are the preferred objects of research and analysis. The opportunities provided by the specifics of organizational subordination and interpersonal relationships are considered only from the point of view of the leader as a role model and a person responsible for strengthening follower resilience (e.g., Caniels and Hatak, 2019; Lin and Liao, 2020; Eliot, 2020; Rezaee *et al.*, 2021). Concepts such as leadership (or leader) resilience and employee resilience are widely explored, while the construct of followership resilience remains not developed yet.

The concept of resilience in all of its configurations can be applied in various bodies, but it is important to be recognized by local and state governments, particu-

larly in times of disturbances and temporary perturbations. Unpredictable crises like the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to occur far more frequently than ever before and administrative structures will have to adapt quickly and effectively (Marks and Knassmüller, 2021). When surprised institutions are forced to act fast and decisively, they have to make use of all resources available. Among the most valuable, yet neglected social resources are subordinate employees.

In an attempt to present a new perspective to the problem of developing organizational capabilities to respond and adapt, I argue that followership resilience is a holistic construct that goes well beyond the dimensions of mental and physical health at an individual level and plays an important role in the overall effectiveness of administrative structures. In the course of defending this thesis, the study provides an important contribution to the research in public administration performance management.

The paper is organized into five sections. The next section explores the conceptual framework of the study. The third section describes the methods used in the study, while the fourth section is dedicated to empirical results and discussion. Finally, conclusions, limitations, and future research directions are outlined.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

Management scholars have long known that followership is essential to organizational leadership (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2014). Mary Parker Follett was among the first to recommend more research into a subject matter that she stated was ‘of the utmost importance, but which has been far too little considered, and that’s the part of followers...’ (Follett, 1949, p. 41). Sporadic attempts to study obedience (Milgram, 1965) and the influence of followers on leaders (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975; Herold, 1977) have been made since her call, but for a long time, followership has remained out of the focus of researchers’ attention. Among the provocateurs of increased interest are the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory of Dienesch and Liden (1986), the theory of followership of Kelley (1992), and many other concepts (Gabarro and Kotter, 1980; Biggart and Hamilton, 1984; Schriesheim and Hinkin, 1990; Wayne and Ferris 1990) that gained popularity in the late twentieth century.

Over the last two decades, the interest in followership has gradually begun to catch the attention paid to leadership (Baker, 2007; Kelley, 2008; Carsten *et al.*, 2010; Sy, 2010). In parallel, researchers have changed their attitude towards the role of the follower, considering it ‘a fundamental necessity for effective organizational functioning’ (Lapierre and Carsten, 2014, p. 159). Most of them tend to agree with Kelley (1992) who contends that followers have more influence on organizational performance than leaders and that little can be accomplished without followers. Depending on the situation and the demands of the organization, leaders, and followers can change their roles (Townsend, 2002) – a capability that can prove invaluable in a highly turbulent environment.

It is this interchangeability that reveals the true nature and importance of resilient followership as an organizational resource and a part of a dynamic system for reaction and adaptation to adverse events, whether they originate from the external or internal environment of the organization. Although contemporary scholarship has already acknowledged a relationship between employee resilience and organizational resilience, ‘interventions aimed at developing employee resilience tend to use stress and well-being as proxy resilience indicators, focusing primarily on individual rehabilitation’ (Kuntz *et al.*, 2017, p. 223). In this sense, the concept of resilience is not limited to systems within an employee (or a follower) as a human being (e.g., stress-response system, immune system, cardiovascular system) or even to the whole person as a system (Masten and Narayan, 2012). Having in mind followers, Franken *et al.* (2020, p. 93) recognizes employee resilience as beneficial for organizations and describes it as ‘the capacity to continuously adapt and flourish, even in the face of challenge’.

Therefore, followership resilience is not only about the physical and psychological health of followers. Followership resilience is about the healthy readiness of followers to pursue organizational goals and achieve desired outcomes despite adversities. It can be thought of as a sub-system of administrative resilience, explained by Sarker *et al.* (2019, p. 717) as ‘the ability of the administrative system to provide appropriate measures to uncertainties’.

It is clear that dimensions affecting the ability of followers to minimize risks and adapt to uncertainties are more than what they appear on the surface. To better understand the multidimensional nature of followership resilience a more in-depth approach is needed. Drawing on the work of Hughes and Bushell (2013), at least five interrelated dimensions can be identified: physical and mental health, appropriate attitudes, innovation potential, contingency resources, and organizational support. The former four dimensions concern followers as individuals, while the latter dimension refers to organizational aspects such as communication and culture.

As an organizational resource, followership resilience can be regarded as an essential element of the organizational resilience system as a whole. Building on the definition of Luthans (2002), I define followership resilience as the physical and psychological readiness and capacity of subordinates to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress, and increased responsibility.

Research on followership reveals that subordinates can enact the role of the follower in very different ways – some may choose to stick to their superior’s instructions by displaying a very passive style of followership, while others may support their manager’s ideas or decisions by using a much more proactive approach (Carsten *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, some subordinates may prefer to trust superiors, while others may choose to trust their own judgment. Observation shows that different attitudes and intentions result in variations in the selection of the ‘best’ course of action in given conditions (Byrne, 2014), especially in times of stress and anxiety.

It may be argued that diversity in followership resilience extends beyond proactivity and trust – scholars offer ample evidence for the relationship between resilience and other individual differences, including proficiency, adaptivity, optimism, self-efficacy, and assertiveness (e.g., Kim, 2020; Sarkar and Fletcher, 2014; Mache *et al.*, 2014). Undoubtedly, all of these aspects matter and most of them can contribute to organizational effectiveness after a crisis situation (Nguyen *et al.*, 2016). However, the purpose of this paper is not to provide an exhaustive explanation of each possible variation of followership resilience. As it has been stated above, my aim is to reveal and explore only the main perceptions and intentions, related to followership resilience.

Taking into consideration the object of my research and the specifics of Bulgarian public administration, I have chosen to focus my attention on perceptions and preferences, conditioning the decision-making process and teamwork – challenging areas, already observed by Bulgarian scholars (e.g., Terziev *et al.*, 2017; Georgiev, 2020). The link of these areas to proactivity and trust is obvious. Proactive followers strive to contribute to the leadership decision-making process (Lapierre and Carsten, 2014, p. 160), and their proactive personality influences employee resilience (Zhu and Li, 2021). Regarding the second challenging area, research shows a strong relationship between teamwork and trust in management (Kiffin-Petersen and Cordery, 2003), while scholars (Longstaff and Yang, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2019) state the important role of trust in building resilience.

There is no doubt that employees in government organizations need to be resilient to manage challenges such as resource constraints, rising demands, and the tensions and contradictions that underlie much public sector work (Franken *et al.*, 2020). Building on the research of Zhu and Li (2021) it is logical to assume that followers who tend to take the initiative will be more resilient to adversities than employees who prefer to follow instructions. In addition, in accordance with the observations of Longstaff and Yang (2008), it is presumable that subordinates in public organizations who are likely to trust their managers will be more resilient to internal and external tensions than public sector employees who are predisposed to trust their own judgment.

3. Material and method

3.1 Aim, objectives and research questions

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to draw the attention of researchers and managers on followership resilience, and second, to explore proactivity and trust as factors of followership resilience in administrative structures.

The main objectives are as follows:

O1. To introduce the concept of followership resilience as a multidimensional construct and to analyze its role in organizational readiness to respond adequately to external adversities;

O2. To explore the preferences and willingness of employees from three Bulgarian municipalities (1) to follow instructions or take initiative, and (2) to trust the superior or trust their own judgment as key followership resilience factors; and

O3. To identify opportunities for followership resilience enhancement in Bulgarian administrative structures.

Taking into account the conceptual framework, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

Q1. What are the prevailing perceptions and preferences of municipal employees regarding their participation in the decision-making process and their readiness to trust superiors?

Q2. How these perceptions and preferences affect followership resilience in the three municipalities studied?

Q3. What employees' attitudes and perceptions serve best the needs of administrative structures in terms of followership resilience?

3.2 Research design and data collection

The research philosophy of this study adopts an inductive content analysis perspective. The study is based on a qualitative approach with a combination of research strategies. As it aims to introduce a new perspective to the concept of resilience, exploratory research was entailed. The study also aims to explore and describe personal characteristics of public sector employees in Bulgaria, for which I used a descriptive strategy.

Following the recommendations of Saunders *et al.* (2019), semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument of primary data collection. They were conducted from June 2015 to September 2019 on a sample of 35 municipal employees (10.2% from the general population) from three Bulgarian municipalities – Ruse (15), Svishtov (11), and Tutrakan (9). Data were collected to explore followership resilience by means of followers' psychological readiness to participate in the decision-making process and to trust superiors. At the end of each interview session, a conclusion about respondents' perceptions and preferences was drawn and shared with each of them. All participants confirmed the results obtained.

Secondary data collection involved retrieving information on followership and employee resilience from scientific journals, reports, and books.

4. Results and discussion

Thirty-two interviewees (91%) showed a willingness to leave decision-making to the superior, comfortably accepting the role of the executor. The rest stated their preference to contribute to public administration efficiency with their ideas and to take personal responsibility in solving emerging problems. In this paper, the former interviewees are called Strict Followers and the latter – Creative Initiators. Based on the information gained from the interviews, a short description of these characters and their relation to followership resilience is presented below.

Strict Followers are reluctant to be actively involved in the decision-making process. They prefer to follow detailed instructions and report to their superiors at every step. Thus, their responsibility is limited only to the quality of implementation of decisions made by another.

Regarding followership resilience, they have three significant advantages. First, Strict Followers do not waste their superior's time in an argument or discussion. This could be very important for the organization, especially in a time of crisis, when every minute is valuable. Second, they accept the fact that superiors are better acquainted with the general organizational context. Thus, (1) leaders are confident in the exact following of their instructions and timely achievement of the desired result, and (2) the risk of making a decision based on incomplete information is reduced. And third, Strict Followers are tolerant of new orders. They agree that superiors have their motives for the change and do not question its expediency.

However, the shortcomings of Strict Followers are not less important:

- Strict Followers show restraint in presenting their own point of view to the superior. Reluctance in sharing their opinion can be explained both by fear of a possible mistake and by the anxiety of taking on more responsibility. In both cases, the efficiency and competitiveness of the organization decrease due to the limited range of opportunities taken into account.
- When performing unstructured tasks with a high degree of uncertainty (situations in which followership resilience comes into play), Strict Followers take a lot of superior's time for preliminary directions and additional instructions. This overload distracts managers from crisis mode, reduces the chances of a quick response, and leads to a decreased organizational efficiency as a whole.
- In case of a changed situation or circumstances, Strict Followers tend to wait for new instructions. This slows down the reaction time and reduces the chances of dealing with the crisis. Given the nature of public sector work, sometimes their hesitation can be fatal and cause irreparable damage.

Although significantly fewer in number, Creative Initiators are also found in the surveyed municipalities. During the interviews, they all revealed a common distinctive feature – their proactive personality. Strict Followers discussed above can also show significant activity, but it is primarily related to the exact following of goals and tasks set by the superior. Apart from action, however, proactivity also includes the notion of 'acting in advance' (In this sense, a sign of equality can be placed between initiative and proactivity as personal qualities). Creative Initiators strive to participate in the initial phase of the problem-solving process – the decision-making phase. They prefer to have relative independence in determining how to perform the task and to accomplish the final goal.

Creative Initiators bring some benefits to followership resilience in public administration. First, they are not simply trying to avoid routine and monotony, but are embracing uncertainty. Creative Initiators are constantly looking for new challenges

and inventing innovative approaches to carry out the task. This explains their tolerance for change and their rapid response (often adequate) to unexpected situational fluctuations – a highly valued feature with respect to followership resilience, especially in administrative structures with a dynamic internal and external environment.

As a second benefit, the participation of Creative Initiators in decision-making broadens the horizons of their superiors. More alternatives are being considered and better decisions are being made. Moreover, the mutual interaction creates in them strong moral incentives for even higher proactive behavior and consequently strengthens followership resilience by providing opportunities to use one's full potential.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, Creative Initiators are able to achieve good results even with a relatively incapacitated superior – their independence to some extent neutralizes his/her shortcomings. Their enthusiasm is contagious and allows subordinates to do what the superior is unable to do. In case their initiative is accompanied by appropriate competence, they can rely on the support and assistance of other organizational members and thus, enhance followership resilience as a whole.

Nevertheless, the interviews identified some limitations of Creative Initiators:

- They seldom realize that their information is insufficient. They tend to decide and act hastily, based on a subjective assessment of the situation, with no idea of the general picture of the organization. The lack of awareness of their insufficient information leads to underestimation of the risks and avoidance of support from the superior. One of the interviewees confessed that he considers it a matter of honor to cope with the problem on his own. Unfortunately, sometimes this 'coping' does not lead to its solution, but its deepening.
- In case of following certain mandatory parameters of decisions imposed on them from above, Creative Initiators may lose part of their motivation. At the same time, their preference for non-programmed decisions and unstructured tasks creates tension in others and increases the stress intensity in the administrative structure as a whole. In other words, instead of dealing with a crisis, they may provoke it.
- Ongoing decision-making discussions can be time-consuming. The willingness of Creative Initiators to present and defend different points of view and opinions may exceed the time available to the superior to listen to them. This does not bring competitive advantages to the organization, especially in crises.

The analysis shows that it is not possible to state definitively which of the two types (Strict Followers or Creative Initiators) favors greater followership resilience. In disasters and crises that have arisen before a decision to respond is made, the benefits of Strict Followers outweigh the harms. It is assumed that the superior is familiar with the problem and sees the big picture. In such cases, the strict adherence to the instructions received enhances followership resilience. However, when adversity appears unexpectedly to subordinates during their routine work, the need for a prompt

and adequate response may be decisive. In such situations, the qualities of Creative Initiators come to the fore and increase the chances of followers to 'bounce back' successfully.

A second objective of the interviews was to explore respondents' preference to trust leaders or to trust their own judgment. Only eight interviewees (23%) declared their readiness to trust superiors, while the rest twenty-seven (77%) were more inclined to trust their own judgment. Here, the former interviewees are called Trustful Conformists, and the latter are named Skeptical Dissenters.

Relatively constant readiness of employees to perceive other people's ideas as their own can be defined as conformity orientation. Research shows that it increases in people who are afraid of disapproval or rejection (Boyatzis, 1991). But, in addition to the psychological readiness to trust, it also depends on the personality of the superior. For example, subordinates who feel the manager's support and care can have a higher degree of trust in this particular leader (McAllister, 1995) and eventually can change their orientation with another manager. Therefore, if followers who are afraid of disapproval or rejection have received constant support from previous managers, they will be inclined to adapt their opinion to the ideas of the superior. Trustful Conformists do not question the goals and tasks assigned to them by superiors. They agree that the position of the superior provides a more comprehensive view of the organization, while followers' limited horizons do not favor the development of reasoned opinions.

In terms of followership resilience, the following advantages of Trustful Conformists were identified:

- Trustful Conformists are predictable team players, who reduce the level of internal uncertainty in the organization. They are ready to accept organizational goals as personal. Superiors generally approve when subordinates leave it to them to set important goals and priorities. Seeing that followers share their goals and tasks, superiors tend to consult with subordinates more often and delegate more responsibility to them (Graen and Scandura, 1987). In addition, because of the mutual confidence, superiors are less concerned about performance control. Paradoxically, this increases the independence of Trustful Conformists.
- Trustful Conformists maintain good relations with superiors. The level of conflict between the two parties is kept low without much effort. This significantly reduces the overall level of work stress and increases the likelihood that the follower will receive support from the leader in adversities.
- All Trustful Conformists among the interviewees reported enhanced communication with superiors. Obviously, the level of information exchange between the two levels is high and, on this basis, the management decisions taken by both parties timely reflect unexpected changes in the situation.

However, two weaknesses of Trustful Conformists also have to be taken into consideration. First, they tend to avoid confrontations with the superior. Thus, they plant

a sense of infallibility in superiors which is a prerequisite for ignoring some warning signs of imminent danger and underscoring the importance of crisis prevention. And secondly, conflicting goals and tasks paralyze Trustful Conformists, as it is difficult for them to decide which one to follow. The available evidence suggests that this condition is due to high dependability on the superior's decisions and lack of anticipation of possible complications.

Skeptical Dissenters are at the other extreme. They do not tend to accept the ideas of the superior, but to trust their own judgment. Usually, their reluctance is based on suspicion of superiors' competence or disagreement with their views. This attitude does not bother professionally and morally mature managers who highly value the independence of their subordinates and prefer it to team-working skills (Buckingham and Coffman, 2014).

Experimental evidence shows that subordinates are more inclined than their superiors to avoid direct confrontation with the other party, and for this reason, leaders may be left with an inaccurate idea of the real feelings of distrust on the part of followers (Fitness, 2000). This often makes their skepticism difficult to detect by the manager. They may prefer to hide their disagreement with the leader deep inside to avoid possible complications.

Despite their reluctance for teamwork with leaders, Skeptical Dissenters can be beneficial for followership resilience in administrative structures for the following reasons:

- Skeptical Dissenters do not automatically execute the superiors' decisions, usually due to their belief that more efficient approaches can be found (as one of the interviewees put it: 'There is always a better way to get a job done'). Based on the information at their disposal, they try to understand the meaning of the decisions and modify them depending on the conditions of the specific situation. In consequence, a crisis can be prevented.
- Skeptical Dissenters make the most of their knowledge and skills. As a result of their efforts, the organization receives reliable information 'from the line of fire'. This allows a quick response and usually, their adequate judgments are not susceptible to manipulation by a superior.
- Skeptical Dissenters warn of problems and identify favorable opportunities. They often act as a 'devil's advocate', which allows them to recognize system faults or malfunctions as early as possible.

In addition to their direct impact on followership resilience, Skeptical Dissenters indirectly affect organizational resilience in general. By being skeptical, they unconsciously improve the individual results of their superiors. As leaders expect resistance from distrustful followers (explicit or implicit), they pay more attention to the quality of decisions made, devoting additional time to gathering detailed information, analyzing alternative approaches, and refining their argumentation. Thus, leaders maintain consistently high standards in their work, which has a positive effect on organizational resilience.

The influence of Skeptical Dissenters on leader's decisions can be considered positive if it is accompanied by high technical competence in the relevant field. From the standpoint of their knowledge and experience, they are able to make changes that will increase decision effectiveness. If their competence is in question, their attitude may have a negative impact on organizational performance.

However, the shortcomings of Skeptical Dissenters can be manifested even by competent employees. They arise primarily from the permanent risk of communication problems and conflict.

As a rule, the information exchange between Skeptical Dissenters and superiors is not particularly intense. Communication between the two levels is rarely sincere and open. Each of the parties seeks to attract more supporters – an aspiration that takes a lot of energy from employees, and in its extreme can affect negatively not only followership resilience but the effectiveness of the administrative structure as a whole.

A fertile ground for confronting different points of view and increasing resistance is the internal environment of administrative structures that are characterized by ambiguous or unreasonable goals. In such structures, decisions may become more subjective under the influence of individual, group, or party interests. Research shows that when there are problems in leader-follower relationships, the first thing to consider is the appropriate interpretation of the goals and the methods that contribute most to their achievement (Boccialetti, 1995). In other words, a difference in the goals of the two parties involved and in methods for achieving them is a serious prerequisite for corrosion of relations. Thus, Skeptical Dissenters risk not only their career but also the effectiveness of their joint, not particularly synergistic, performance.

In organizations with a predominant number of Skeptical Dissenters (like the three municipalities studied), the likelihood of losing focus and coordination increases. The lack of trust between different hierarchical levels leads to a waste of time for explanations and inspections. In its extremes, it becomes difficult to reach an agreement even on the main purpose and direction of the organization.

In summary, the results of the interviews discussed above are presented in Figure 1.

The uneven distribution of respondents in the general matrix is impressive. At first glance, the gathering of the majority of interviewees (69%) in one quadrant and their complete absence in another is puzzling. Furthermore, it seems illogical for such a large part of employees to show a preference to follow instructions, but at the same time not to trust leaders.

Most likely this can be explained by the peculiarities of the municipalities in Bulgaria as administrative structures. The practice of appointing supporters to key positions in the municipality by the party that won the local elections is very common and has become almost traditional. Worried about their jobs, lower-level employees prefer not to take responsibility but to follow instructions. At the same time, most of the newly appointed managers do not have the competence and experience needed to gain the trust of their subordinates. As one interviewee put it: 'Why should I give my boss advice if he wouldn't listen to reason, and in the end, I'll be the guilty one!?!'

Willingness to participate in decision-making	High	0 Creative Initiators / Trustful Conformists	3 Creative Initiators / Skeptical Dissenters
	Low	8 Strict Followers / Trustful Conformists	24 Strict Followers / Skeptical Dissenters
		High	Low
		Readiness for teamwork	

Figure 1: Division of interviewees according to their willingness to participate in decision-making and readiness for teamwork

Source: Own calculation based on semi-structured interviews with 35 municipal employees

The very limited presence of Creative Initiators in the studied municipalities is also worrying – two in Ruse and one in Tutrakan. The question rightly arises as to how municipalities meet the expectations for new public management if they do not have proactive employees needed to take full advantage of favorable opportunities and to rebound from adversities in order to improve the lives of people in their communities. Probably this partly explains the focus of Bulgarian municipalities on routine activities such as developing projects to apply for various EU support funds, neglecting activities that have proven their importance for job creation and living standards enhancement, such as attracting private investment and improving the business environment (Nikolov, 2019).

Definitely, depending on the specifics of the situation, each of the four types of followers can be beneficial to the organization. Knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their even dispersion in public administration, have the potential to increase the followership resilience and effectiveness of institutions. In other words, the formula for successful followership resilience in terms of proactivity and trust involves achieving balance and coherence.

Due to human resources key role in organizational resilience as a whole, it is legitimate to expect that strengthening followership resilience of public administration employees will make institutions more resilient.

5. Conclusions and future research directions

The study explores followership resilience in three Bulgarian municipalities. Its purpose is twofold: first, to draw the attention of researchers and managers on followership resilience, and second, to explore proactivity and trust as factors of followership resilience in administrative structures. The study is based on a qualitative approach within a combination of research strategies – exploratory and descrip-

tive. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews, to explore followership resilience by means of followers' psychological readiness to participate in the decision-making process and to trust superiors. Four types of followers are identified and strengths and weaknesses of each type are discussed. It is concluded that the formula for successful followership resilience in terms of proactivity and trust involves achieving balance and coherence.

The attempt to introduce and define followership resilience is definitely a strength of this study. Positive features are also the identification of four types of followers and attraction of attention on their uneven dissemination in some Bulgarian municipalities. In order to overcome this weakness and strengthen the overall organizational resilience, public administration employees need to undergo special training for self-analysis of their resilience as followers.

However, the study is not without limitations. First, the limited number of administrative structures and followers surveyed makes it useless to apply statistical methods, which compromises the reliability of the study, leaves doubt that the results obtained are context specific and prevents the formulation of significant conclusions. Second, it disregards the impact of individual diversity (ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.) on followership resilience in public administration. Third, the study only hints at the link between followership and leadership resilience, leaving it unclear how they exactly correlate with organizational resilience and effectiveness. Perhaps future researchers will be interested to explore more explicitly the relations between these constructs.

Finally, followership resilience factors in administrative structures need to be considered in a more systematic approach. How is their combined influence mediated by other public administration characteristics like the nature of the job or the hierarchical level to which they relate? How does organizational culture affect followership resilience? What is the role of local communities and civil society as catalysts for new public management regarding followership resilience? These and many other challenging questions wait to be answered.

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