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CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FOLLOWER DEPENDENCY IN EUROPEAN
CORPORATE COMPANIES

Bachelor Thesis

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I have written this Bachelor Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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Introduction

In many organisations, work is largely organised around close interaction between supervisors and employees, or in other words, leaders and followers. In corporate companies, operating across different business and professional fields, followers are expected to show initiative, independent judgment and creativity, while at the same time relying on leaders for direction, feedback, and even access to key resources. Such interdependence is quite typical in many work environments and some degree of reliance on a leader is a normal aspect of organisational relationships.

However, previous research suggests that in some situations it may develop into a form of excessive and potentially problematic reliance on the leader, where followers depend on the leader not only for task-related guidance but also for motivation, confidence, or emotional reassurance (Kark et al., 2003; Kets de Vries, 1988, as cited in Kollmann et al., 2013). This pattern is commonly discussed in the literature as follower or subordinate dependency. Follower dependency includes cognitive dependency on the leader for thinking and decisions, and motivational dependency for effort and approval (Gu et al., 2016, as cited in Yang et al., 2021; Kark et al., 2003).

Follower dependency is especially relevant in the corporate field, where young employees usually start with junior, trainee, internship, or other early-career professional roles. At this stage, employees are still developing professional confidence, role clarity, and independent judgement, while also learning how to function within formal organisational structures. Research on newcomer adjustment also shows that early employment involves uncertainty reduction, role learning, self-efficacy development, and social integration, with supervisors often serving as important sources of task-related and social information (Bauer et al., 2007; Nifadkar, 2018). Chong et al. (2021) further show that newcomer socialisation is closely connected to the development of autonomy, competence, and relatedness through organisational and supervisory support. In this context, follower dependency becomes important because normal learning-based reliance on supervisors may, under certain conditions, develop into excessive and problematic dependency before professional autonomy is fully formed for young employees.

In the academic research, follower dependency has been discussed for several decades, most often in studies of transformational, charismatic, or servant leadership (Kark et al., 2003; Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013; Zheng et al., 2024). Yet, despite recurring interest in the concept, follower dependency is rarely examined as a phenomenon in its own right. Moreover, existing research provides only a fragmented understanding of what causes

follower dependency and what consequences it has for employees. Instead, it is usually incorporated in broader theoretical models and treated as one variable among others used to explain only some organisational outcomes, such as employee creativity and work passion, or even leaders' emotional exhaustion (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013; Han et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2024). As a result, follower dependency itself, its causes, and consequences are often discussed indirectly rather than systematically examined as the central focus of research. This is especially problematic in relation to consequences: existing research often tends to focus more on how dependency emerges than on what it leads to, so relatively little is known about how follower dependency affects followers themselves, for example their autonomy, initiative, decision-making, creativity, satisfaction, or motivation at work. Therefore, the concept often remains secondary, both theoretically and empirically, and is not fully studied.

Additionally, previous research on follower dependency has often been developed within leadership studies, where attention is given to leaders, their traits, behaviours, or leadership styles (Kark et al., 2003; Kollmann et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2021). This leader-related perspective is also relevant for this thesis, because supervisors can influence important work conditions through the guidance, feedback, recognition, control, and support they provide to employees. For this reason, leader-related factors are relevant for examining possible causes of follower dependency. However, since follower dependency directly concerns followers' autonomy, decision-making, motivation, and confidence, it is also important to examine what consequences dependency may have for employees themselves (Kark et al., 2003; Yukl, 1998, as cited in Kollmann et al., 2013). This thesis does not attempt to explain all possible origins and effects of follower dependency, but rather focuses more narrowly on some selected leader-related factors that may be associated with it and some selected employee-related consequences that may follow from it.

The relevance of follower dependency is also reinforced by recent organisational design literature, which shows growing interest in less hierarchical and more self-managing forms of organising. Since these structures involve decentralised authority, reduced reliance on traditional supervisor-subordinate relationships, and greater employee autonomy in organising work and making decisions, excessive follower dependency becomes particularly relevant as a potential barrier to independent functioning in contemporary organisations (Billinger & Workiewicz, 2019; Ketkar & Workiewicz, 2021; Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Martela, 2019; Schell & Bischof, 2021). Valkiainen (2026) especially strengthens this argument by showing that employees may be formally given autonomy, but psychologically still remain used to seeking approval, validation, and direction from managers. This suggests

that even when organisations remove or reduce formal managerial authority, employees may still reproduce dependency as a learned psychological pattern: through hesitation, approval-seeking, reduced initiative, and continued reliance on former authority figures.

It is worth noting that empirical research on follower dependency is still relatively recent. The majority of available studies have been published after 2020, which suggests that the field is still developing. In addition, prior empirical work is geographically concentrated. Many studies have been conducted in Asian context, particularly in China (e.g., Yang et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2024), while only a small number of studies used Western European samples (e.g., Kollmann et al., 2013). Given cross-cultural differences in leadership norms, power distance, and organisational practices, findings based mainly on Chinese samples may not be directly transferable to Western organisations. This limits the generalisability of existing results and points to the need for research conducted in other regions and cultural settings.

Taken together, the limitations discussed indicate a clear research gap in the literature on follower dependency. In addition, previous empirical studies have often examined follower dependency within specific sectoral samples from business and professional fields, such as banking and IT, for example. This thesis follows a similar, more context-specific approach of analysing in some corporate companies in a number of European countries, but rather adds novelty to the existing research by examining follower dependency specifically in relation to both selected leader-related causes and selected employee-related consequences, which has not been addressed enough in this way in previous research, especially in the European context.

From a practical perspective, the findings may be useful for managers, team leaders, and HR specialists, especially working with young and early-career employees. Understanding how follower dependency is associated with its possible leader-related causes and employee-related consequences can help organisations build supervisor-employee relationships that provide necessary support without creating excessive reliance on the leader. This is also important in modern organisations implementing less hierarchical and more self-management structures.

Therefore, this research aims to examine the causes and consequences of follower dependency in corporate companies in a number of European countries by analysing the relationships between follower dependency, selected leader-related causes, and employee-related consequences among employees working across different business and professional fields.

The author reviews existing studies, conducts an empirical analysis, and compares the results. The research tasks to achieve this aim are:

- Present and analyse existing definitions and types of follower dependency
- Provide theoretical background on follower dependency, its foundations and also two types – cognitive and motivational in leadership and organisational research
- Provide an overview of previous empirical studies which examined the causes and consequences of follower dependency
- Collect and analyse data on individuals' levels of follower dependency, its leader-related causes and employee-related consequences through an online survey conducted among mostly young and early-career employees in some corporate companies in a number of European countries
- Conclude by presenting and discussing the results of the empirical research and compare the results with findings of the previous researchers

This paper consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework by defining follower dependency, discussing its main types – cognitive and motivational, and reviewing prior empirical research on its causes and consequences. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach of the empirical study. The paper concludes by summarising the main findings, discussing their implications, and identifying limitations and directions for future research. The author also acknowledges the use of AI-assisted tools for English language editing, formatting support, formulating some of the survey questions, and translation of the resume to the Estonian language during the preparation of this thesis.

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Keywords: follower dependency, leaders, followers, causes and consequences of follower dependency, European corporate companies.

1. Theoretical framework on follower dependency phenomena, its causes and consequences

1.1. Defining follower dependency and bringing out its types

The first subchapter will explore the definition fundamental to the thesis's topic, follower dependency, and will introduce its types. Before introducing the concept itself, it should be noted that in leadership and organizational research, a follower is generally understood as an employee or subordinate in relation to their direct supervisor, manager, or leader. The leader is generally understood as the person occupying a supervisory or managerial role in relation to employees or subordinates, typically providing direction, guidance, feedback, and access to resources (Kark et al., 2003, p. 246; Wee et al., 2017, p. 1; Yukl, 1998, as cited in Kollmann et al., 2013, p. 8).

The author has collected eight definitions of follower dependency, which are presented in Table 1. It is important to acknowledge that a considerable number of the definitions included in the table are derived from secondary sources. This is due to the fact that some original sources were either inaccessible or did not provide a precise formulation of the term. Nonetheless, the compiled definitions still offer a reliable and informative synthesis of how the concept is variously explained across the literature.

An examination of the existing definitions of follower dependency shows that authors approach this concept from diverse disciplinary perspectives, including psychology, organisational behaviour, and leadership studies. Therefore, the definitions vary in their degree of specificity and conceptual breadth.

One of the first definition identified in this review appears in Sheppard and Sherman (1998). It is the most general definition of „simple dependence“ and can, at a fundamental level, be described as a relational condition between people. Someone is said to be dependent on another when their decision or action comes not from their own reasoning, but from reasoning and behaviour of someone else. In the leader-follower relationship, it would mean that the follower cannot function on their own in terms of performing work tasks and rely on the leader's guidance heavily for achieving the required result.

Next, the most frequently cited definitions come from Kark et al. (2003) and Kets De Vries & Miller (1984) as both cited in Zhao et al., 2025, p. 3, and Kets de Vries (1988, as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8). Their works appear repeatedly across secondary citations and set the theoretical understanding of dependency specifically in leader-follower relations for many other authors.

Table 1

“Follower Dependency” definitions

Author(s)	Definition
Birtchnell et al. (1988) as cited in Han et al 2023, p. 3	“Birtchnell et al. (1988) argue that a dependent person needs to receive recognition, guidance, and guidance from others in order to make up for their shortcomings and, more importantly, to accept, endorse, and advocate for the values of others.”
Horwitz 2023, p. 26	“...it can lead to choosing a highly polarizing, insensitive leader and even promote follower dependency that only becomes evident after a period of their leadership has passed”.
Kark et al., 2003; Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984 as cited in Zhao et al 2025, p. 3	“Dependency on leader is defined as a psychological state that can be activated by contextual factors (Kark et al., 2003; Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984)”
Kark et al 2003, p 246	“Dependence on the leader has several manifestations. It implies that the subordinate is limited in his or her ability to proceed with work and make decision without the leader’s guidance. Psychologically it means that the subordinate’s motivation and self-esteem depend on receiving recognition and approval from the leader.”
Kets de Vries, 1988 as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8	“...regarding protection and security by idealized authority figures, dependency on them may accrue”.
Sheppard & Sherman 1998, p. 424	"simple dependence" is said to occur when one's outcomes are contingent upon the actions of another”
Wee et al 2017, p.1	“Because of this, followers often find themselves in situations where they are asymmetrically dependent on their leaders for these valued goals and resources (Gargiulo, Ertug, & Galunic, 2009).”
Yukl, 1998 as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8	“...become dependent on the leader for guidance and inspiration (Yukl, 1998)”.

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

Kark et al. (2003) together with Kets De Vries & Miller (1984, as cited in Zhao et al 2025, p. 3) define subordinate dependency on the leader as a state of mind, introducing this phenomena from the psychological side as well rather than only seeing it from operational side e.g. how the follower is performing the work. They emphasise that this psychological state is not necessarily automatic, but can be activated under the influence of the specific context at work. This is important to realise that only in some specific context, shaped either by the leaders’ or followers’ behaviour, or some other factors, dependency can occur.

Kark et al. (2003) provides one of the most well-structured and also psychologically detailed conceptualization. According to Kark (2003), dependence on the leader is expressed in two different ways: the follower’s work-related functioning and the follower’s

psychological state. So, it offers explicit measurement indicators, both practical and psychological, of the follower/subordinate dependency state. Practical includes limited work and decision making autonomy of the subordinate/follower as Sheppard and Sherman (1998) and others emphasised too; psychological indicators is an elaboration Kark et al. (2003) bring out in this definition: it describes dependency in terms of emotions and feelings of the follower and emphasises their need of recognition and approval from the leader to be motivated to perform.

On the other hand, both Kets de Vries (1988, as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8) and Kets De Vries & Miller (1984, as cited in Zhao et al 2025, p. 3) mention follower dependency as a phenomena in the frames of regressive processes in leader-follower relationship and they keep the focus on the psychological aspects of dependency. For example, Kets de Vries (1988) brings out that such factor as protection and security feelings from the idealized leader may lead to dependency. This point is significant from two perspectives. First, the earlier definitions discussed above, dependency is said to occur because of rather negative factors such as inability to perform without the leader for example, which would be perceived mostly negative. However, protection and security are not inherently negative; on the contrary, research suggests that feeling protected by the leader fosters trust and enhances not only baseline performance but also creativity. Studies on psychological safety show that when followers feel safe from negative repercussions, they are more willing to express ideas freely, engage in learning behaviours, and take creative risks (Edmondson, 1999; Amabile et al., 1996). Leader behaviours that demonstrate care and protection further strengthen trust, which has been shown to improve performance and discretionary effort (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). From this perspective, a sense of safety enables authenticity and originality rather than dependency per se (Kark & Shamir, 2002).

But on the other side, and secondly, what is important to notice that the leader is described as „idealized authority“ here, meaning that followers project unrealistic qualities onto leaders, constructing idealised images that, in turn, give rise to exaggerated and often imagined expectations of protection and security from the leader (Kets de Vries, 1988, as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8). In such cases, responsibility for follower dependency may in fact be attributed to the follower’s internal psychological state, or to the leader to the extent that the leader’s behaviour and actions foster, or reinforce, unrealistic expectations.

Other authors go even more in depth in psychological and emotional aspects of follower dependency and connect it to different styles of leadership. For example, Yukl (1998, as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8) discusses charismatic leadership: under such

style, followers may view the leader as unusually exceptional and, as a result, become reliant on the leader for direction and inspiration. This is mostly about how the leader is behaving and its character, “charisma” influencing the followers and bringing out in them the feeling of motivation and inspiration, which can, over time, foster a strong emotional attachment and make followers increasingly reliant on the leader to sustain their drive and direction rather than developing it independently.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, charismatic and transformational leadership styles are often associated with greater follower dependency: because charismatic leaders are commonly admired and taken as role models, while transformational leaders tend to generate exceptionally high levels of trust and confidence among followers (Bass, 1990; Bowlby’s attachment theory; Popper and Mayseless, 2003, all cited in Kollmann et al., 2013, p. 8).

Birtchnell et al. (1988, as cited in Han et al 2023, p. 3) definition continues elaborating on psychological and emotional state of the dependent person, and touches upon another dimensions of those. In particular, it is described that dependency is expressed by person’s need of validation and reassurance from other people, which could even be colleagues, so not necessarily the leader, as they seek for ways to compensate for their own weaknesses or mistakes. So, dependent person needs to consult and get approved by others about how to deal with their problems. Another dimension describes that a dependent person doesn’t just look to others for help or approval. Over time, they may also start to take on other people’s values as their own. Dependency can lead someone to align their beliefs and standards with the people they depend on, even to the point of speaking up for those beliefs.

Alternatively, Wee et al. (2017) explains follower dependency through the power a leader possess in the organization. This definition focuses mostly on hierarchical relationship, rather than horizontal relationships between colleagues in the organization.

Leaders who hold formal organizational roles often control key goals and resources that followers need in order to achieve their own objectives (Emerson, 1962; Thompson, 1967 as cited in Wee et al., 2017). In such way, leaders have some degree of control over followers, and followers in turn often have the need of their leaders to get access to important for them resources, opportunities, approvals, information, etc. It has been pointed out that such dynamics between followers and leaders is highly uneven or asymmetrical. The follower needs the leader more than the leader needs the follower. By default, it comes out in this situation that the follower has fewer alternatives and pushed to rely on the leader mostly, who is in power of things the follower values.

Horwitz (2023) adds to the discussion about the types of leaders and their influence on followers. He notes that a narcissistic leader may use charisma to influence followers not only during the leader-selection process but also after taking the role, reinforcing their position over time (Bass, 1985; Norton et al., 2014; Yukl, 2010 as cited in Horwitz, 2023). This can become a “trap” for teams, resulting in poor leadership and a situation in which employees increasingly rely on the leader for direction and motivation, creating unhealthy dependence later on. Importantly, this is the only definition that highlights the delayed nature of the problem: the harmful follower dynamics often develop gradually and are not obvious in the beginning, making it difficult to detect early on how the leader’s influence will evolve.

Even though researchers have defined “follower dependency” in different ways, the definitions still have conceptual gaps. One major gap is that these definitions do not clearly distinguish between healthy and unhealthy dependency, even though dependency is generally portrayed in a predominantly negative light. Healthy dependency would be normal, useful reliance e.g., asking a manager for direction, learning, coordination, support. Unhealthy dependency would constitute excessive reliance e.g., needing the leader to think and decide instead of the follower themselves, follower’s fear of acting independently.

The distinction between healthy dependency and unhealthy dependency is especially important when follower dependency is considered in relation to young and early-career employees, who are often also newcomers to organisations. Although “newcomers” and “young employees” are not identical categories, they often overlap, because younger employees are more likely to be at the beginning of their professional careers, recently entering organisational roles, and still learning how to behave and perform in a work environment. Newcomer adjustment literature is therefore useful for explaining this stage, as it conceptualises organisational entry as a period of uncertainty reduction, role learning, and the development of role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance (Bauer et al., 2007). At this stage, reliance on a supervisor may be functional and even necessary because employees often need guidance, feedback, task interpretation, and social orientation to understand what is expected from them. However, the same conditions may also make young employees more prone to excessive dependency if necessary support does not gradually lead to independent judgement, but instead makes the leader the main reference point for thinking, confidence, motivation, or decision-making. This interpretation can be partly linked to Nifadkar’s (2018) study which shows that newcomers enter organisations with limited knowledge of their supervisors and gradually form perceptions of them through direct experience and observation, which then shapes their task-related and social information seeking from

supervisors. In other words, how newcomers see their supervisor may affect how much they rely on them for guidance, reassurance, and understanding work situations. If this support helps employees become more independent over time, it can be seen as a healthy form of dependency. However, if the supervisor becomes the main source of direction, confidence, or motivation, this reliance may turn into problematic dependency.

Chong et al. (2021) also add that newcomer socialisation is closely connected to the satisfaction of psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that supervisor autonomy support plays an important role in this process. This shows that the type and quality of supervisory support matters for newcomers' further development at work. According to Chong et al. (2021), autonomy-supportive supervisors give meaningful explanations for work tasks, offer choices when possible, acknowledge employees' perspectives and feelings, and encourage initiative and proactivity. This kind of support helps newcomers feel more autonomous, competent, and connected at work. At the same time, in the author's of this thesis opinion, it remains debatable whether young employees may sometimes develop unhealthy dependency on a supervisor who is perceived so especially helpful, supportive, and competent from the start.

Overall, younger and early-career employees are especially interesting in the context of follower dependency because their relationships with supervisors develop at a stage where normal learning-based reliance and excessive problematic dependency may be difficult to distinguish, and while their professional autonomy is still being formed.

To continue, existing definitions and discussions are also missing important factors that could change how dependency in follower-leader relationship works. Specifically, the definitions ignore cultural and modern dimensions. For example, in terms of cultural dimension, norms about authority and hierarchy differ across countries (e.g., high vs. low power distance), which affects how normal "reliance on a leader" is.

Next, modern organisational structures such as matrix structures and agile teams, for example, where authority is less clear, may shape dependency differently than traditional hierarchies. Leadership could be also distributed across several team members rather than one leader; dependency might be spread out or look different. Regarding digital leadership and leading through online tools e.g. how remote work can change influence and reliance development.

Especially regarding modern organisational structures compared to traditional hierarchies, Billinger and Workiewicz (2019) describe an ongoing interest in the replacement of traditional top-down hierarchies with more decentralised structures where employees are

given greater autonomy in how they work and which projects they undertake. Similarly, Lee and Edmondson (2017) bring out and define self-managing organisations as organisations that decentralise authority in a formal and systematic way across the organisation, reducing or eliminating the traditional reporting relationship between manager and subordinate. This is also reflected in studies of “boss-less” organisations, where employees may initiate tasks, join projects, and allocate responsibilities without direct managerial interference (Ketkar & Workiewicz, 2021). In this sense, modern organisational design increasingly questions the assumption that employees should depend on one direct superior for direction, task allocation, decision-making, or coordination. Instead, employees are expected to take a more active role in organising their own work, interpreting tasks, making decisions, and coordinating with others. All this shows that follower dependency should be considered in relation to the modern movement toward less hierarchical and more self-managing forms of organisations: excessive and problematic reliance on leaders may limit employees’ ability to function independently when greater autonomy and self-direction are increasingly expected.

Holacracy is one concrete example of such self-managing modern organisational design. Schell and Bischof (2021) explain that holacracy is based on flat hierarchies, purpose-driven work, high requirements for self-leadership, and the replacement of traditional positions with roles. In such systems, employees may hold several roles, assume broader responsibilities, and act more freely within the purpose of their role and circle. Martela (2019) also argues that self-managing organisations differ from bureaucracy and adhocracy because authority and responsibility are more radically decentralised, with employees expected to identify necessary tasks, take responsibility for them, and contribute to coordination through transparency, peer-based accountability, and bottom-up processes. From the perspective of follower dependency, this is important because the ability to function without constant leader guidance at this point becomes a central requirement rather than only a desirable individual quality. If employees strongly depend on leaders for guidance, approval, motivation, or decision-making, they may have difficulties adapting to these organisational forms where managerial authority is reduced and work depends more on self-leadership, independent judgement, and peer coordination. This argument is further supported by Valkiainen (2026), who explains that the transition to distributed authority is not only a structural change but also a psychological process for employees. According to Valkiainen (2026), employees may struggle to internalise newly distributed authority because previous hierarchical work environments can create learned patterns of deference, approval-seeking, and reliance on managers for direction. From the perspective of follower dependency, this

suggests that excessive reliance on leaders may make the transition to self-managing organisational structures even more difficult, as dependency in such cases can be a learned psychological pattern, which might not always be easy to change.

Therefore, examining follower dependency is important because it helps show whether excessive reliance on leaders may be associated with weaker autonomy, initiative, and independent judgement, which are capacities increasingly required in fast-growing contemporary organisational settings.

Additionally, existing research completely overlooks followers' potential strategic agency, tending to portray dependency as a purely passive condition. This leaves unexplored the possibility that followers may deliberately use dependency in an instrumental way, for example to gain access to resources, protection, or opportunities, or to avoid responsibility by relying on the leader's authority.

Despite variation in scope and emphasis, there is substantial consistency across authors. All definitions agree that follower dependency involves a relational asymmetry in which the follower requires or seeks something (either functional or emotional) from the leader to perform effectively. Most researchers agree on the effects of follower dependency, but they disagree on where it comes from and whether it's good, bad or neutral. Some see dependency as normal or even functional in certain leadership relationships, while others see it as inherently risky, linked to manipulation and worse leadership outcomes. However, origins of it are explained differently: some say it comes from the follower's psychological needs whereas others claim it's created by hierarchies and power structures and blame leader behaviour (e.g., controlling, charismatic, manipulative) as well. To sum up, a solid theoretical foundation exists, but the concept has yet to be fully defined, operationalised, and adapted to contemporary contexts.

There are a few criteria on which the definitions could be compared; see Table 2. To construct this table, the definitions were first collected and placed into the Table 1 together with their sources, after which the key meaning elements of each definition were extracted as keywords (e.g., guidance and reduced autonomy, need for approval and security, cognitive or motivational mechanisms, structural asymmetry, or outcome-contingency). Reader can find the tables with the keywords derived from "Follower Dependency" definitions and types in the appendices A and B accordingly.

Next, overlapping or synonymous keywords were simplified and made consistent so that similar formulations across authors could be treated as the same underlying idea (for example, "guidance," "direction," and "control" were read as one theme, and "recognition,"

“approval,” and “emotional security” as another). On this basis, the sources were compared across their keyword sets and grouped according to the dominant emphasis of each definition, which allowed to create five thematic clusters. Each source was then assigned to the cluster that best captured its main focus (with some sources appearing in more than one cluster if they clearly addressed multiple dimensions), and finally each cluster was given a label and a brief explanatory sentence that synthesizes what that group of definitions collectively emphasises about the nature of dependency.

For example, in the first cluster on Guidance and Control by the Leader, the focus is on the functional aspect of follower dependency: followers rely on leaders for direction, decision-making etc. mostly to be able to perform the work tasks. Almost half of the definitions mention this aspect, and it could be considered a baseline or core explanation of follower dependency phenomena. In the author of this thesis's opinion, defining follower dependency by the functional aspect is the easiest way: this aspect is quite straightforward and may not be that complicated as explaining psychological aspects, for example.

Another half of definitions goes under cluster on Emotional and Recognition-Based Relationship. Its focus is on the emotional state of the followers, their feelings towards the leader and interpersonal aspect of dependency: followers seek validation, security, and approval from their leaders. This is already touching psychological aspects of dependency and most authors included it, because it is evident that subordinate dependency is not only about a mere lack of functional autonomy without the leader's guidance, but also involves broader psychological and relational processes such as emotional reliance, reassurance-seeking, a need for recognition within the follower-leader relationship and many more.

Cluster on Psychological and Cognitive Process addresses in greater depth psychological aspect mentioned above. It is focusing on internal mental state of followers, including how they think, process information etc. and how this may or may not form dependency. However, this aspect is already a bit less frequently reflected across the definitions. The reason for that could be that such aspect is harder to explain when defining follower dependency per se and it would usually be explained better in psychological research than in leadership or organisational studies. In contrast, identifying types of follower dependency is more straightforward, as typologies usually describe the follower's mental state and cognitive processes in greater detail. Several of the type-based definitions identified in this study, which will be discussed later, would fit well within this cluster.

After that, cluster about Structural and Situational Imbalance emphasises the contextual and organizational conditions in which leaders control access to goals, resources

etc. and how it influences followers leading to unhealthy dependency. It means that here dependency is understood less as an individual psychological tendency and more as a response to an imbalance arising from situational conditions inside the organisation.

Finally, cluster on Consequences and Outcomes of the Relationship addresses the effects of such dynamics: biased leader selection, the emergence of polarizing figures and the problem of delayed recognition of unhealthy dependency.

Table 2

“Follower Dependency” definitions comparison

Author(s) & year	Guidance and Control by the Leader	Emotional and Recognition-Based Relationship	Psychological and Cognitive Process	Structural and Situational Imbalance	Consequences and Outcomes of the Relationship
Birtchnell et al. (1988) as cited in Han et al 2023, p. 3	-	+	-	-	-
Horwitz 2023, p. 26	-	-	-	-	+
Kark et al., 2003; Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984 as cited in Zhao et al 2025, p. 3	-	-	+	+	-
Kark et al 2003, p. 246	+	+	+	-	-
Kets de Vries, 1988 as Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8	-	+	-	-	-
Sheppard & Sherman 1998, p. 424	+	-	-	-	+
Wee et al 2017, p.1	-	-	-	+	-
Yukl, 1998 as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8	+	-	-	-	-

Note: “-” not mentioned, “+”- mentioned

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

Returning to the earlier discussion, the following section presents the identified types of follower dependency in the literature. Yang et al. (2021), citing Eisenbeiß and Boerner

(2013), distinguish two dimensions of subordinate dependency: cognitive and motivational dependency. The identified types of dependency clearly correspond to the ways in which authors conceptualise follower dependency as a phenomenon, particularly regarding whether the emphasis is placed more on functional or psychological dimensions. Importantly, across the literature reviewed, this two-part distinction appears to be the dominant and almost only explicitly articulated typology: while other works discuss reliance on leaders in different ways (e.g., guidance and sense-making, inspiration and approval), they largely map onto cognitive or motivational dependency rather than introducing additional, separate types (e.g., Gu et al., 2016, as cited in Yang et al., 2021; Kark et al., 2003; Yukl, 1998, as cited in Kollmann et al., 2013).

Gu et al. (2016, as cited in Yang et al., 2021) describe cognitive dependency as reliance on the leader in the course of information processing. In other words, employees look to the leader to make sense of and guide basic cognitive activities such as perceiving, remembering, imagining, and thinking while performing work tasks. Motivational dependency is not described in detail but can be directly drawn from several definitions of follower dependency discussed earlier, for example those emphasising reliance on the leader for inspiration or approval (Kark et al., 2003; Yukl, 1998, as cited in Kollmann et al., 2013). Contrasting with cognitive dependency, motivational one refers to reliance on the leader for the initiation and maintenance of work effort, such as direction, encouragement, and reinforcement, so that the follower's drive to act is contingent on the leader's presence, feedback, or approval to some degree.

Given the variation across existing definitions and the absence of an integrative formulation that captures the concept in full, the author of this thesis proposes the following definition of follower dependency: follower dependency can be defined as a relational condition within leader-follower dynamics in which a follower's ability to function, decide, or sustain motivation becomes partially or excessively contingent on the leader. It can involve functional reliance as well as psychological, cognitive, and motivational reliance, and it may come from individual, relational, or structural conditions, ranging from temporary support to unhealthy state that limits autonomy and creativity.

The conceptual synthesis of the reviewed definitions, the identified types of follower dependency, and the author's proposed integrative definition are presented in the figure which can be found in the Appendix C. In summary, this subchapter reviewed and examined existing definitions and typologies of follower dependency. Building on these perspectives,

the author subsequently formulated an original definition that integrates the key elements identified in the literature.

1.2. Previous empirical research on causes and consequences of follower dependency

This subchapter will present the overview of previous empirical studies which explore follower dependency, specifically its causes and consequences. There were eight empirical studies found and analysed.

Overall, the reviewed studies do not treat follower dependency as a stand-alone phenomenon but instead include it as one of the element within broader models aimed at explaining other organisational outcomes. Much of the empirical work has been published only recently, mainly after 2020, suggesting that follower dependency is still a developing research area and that the available evidence remains limited. Finally, the literature is geographically concentrated, with most studies conducted in China and only a small number based in Western Europe, which means that caution is needed when applying these findings to Western organisational contexts.

Next part of this subchapter will focus on the empirical studies which managed to determine the causes of follower dependency indirectly throughout exploring other phenomena. In the Table 3, main causes detected in the studies are brought out. This table was constructed based on the cause-related keywords extracted from the initially created table for analysis of empirical studies, which can be found in the Appendix D. Then cause-related keywords were coded to indicate which causes were reported in each study.

Table 3

Follower dependency causes comparison

Author(s) & year	Transformational leadership	Positive leadership style	Servant leadership	Leader creativity	Leader narcissism	Personal identification with the leader (as a mechanism)	Environmental uncertainty (as a contextual amplifier)
Eisenbeiß and Boerner, 2013	+	X	X	X	X	X	X
Han et al., 2023	X	+	X	X	X	X	X
Kark et al. 2003	+	X	X	X	X	+	X
Kollmann et al. 2013	+	X	X	X	X	X	X
Yang et al., 2021	X	X	X	X	+	X	+
Zhao et al., 2025	X	X	X	+	X	X	X
Zheng et al., 2024	X	X	+	X	X	X	X

Note: “+”- increasing follower dependency, “X”- not mentioned

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

The causes identified are: Transformational leadership, Positive leadership style, Servant leadership, Leader creativity, Leader narcissism, Personal identification with the leader (as a mechanism) and Environmental uncertainty (as a contextual amplifier). The last two are not causes per se but rather explanatory elements, namely, a mediating mechanism and a contextual boundary condition that shapes the strength of leader effects, and will be explained later on. As is evident, five of the seven identified causes are leader-related and can be meaningfully grouped into two categories: leadership style-related factors (including transformational leadership, servant leadership, and positive leadership style) and leader characteristics-related factors (such as leader creativity and leader narcissism). This distinction shows that follower dependency is shaped both by personal attributes of leaders and by the behavioural patterns and relational approaches they adopt in their leadership roles. It also indicates that the existing empirical evidence conceptualises follower dependency often as a product of certain leaders' traits, methods and behaviours e.g. leadership style mentioned earlier in the subchapter 1.1.

Overall, transformational leadership is the most frequently identified cause to increase follower dependency (three studies), while other causes are each supported by a single empirical study as can be seen from Table 3. Transformational leadership, as defined by Bass (1985), refers to a leadership approach in which leaders motivate followers to transcend self-interest by raising awareness of collective goals and increasing commitment to shared values. Bass and Avolio (1998) emphasise the role of charisma and inspirational vision in generating trust, admiration, and identification with the leader, while Bass and Riggio (2006) conceptualise transformational leadership further as a multidimensional construct consisting of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Through all these mechanisms, transformational leaders often become central sources of meaning and validation for followers, which can lead them to rely on leaders for guidance and confidence; under certain conditions, this reliance may develop into follower dependency.

Kollmann et al. (2013) support the same view regarding transformational leadership, but add that its effects are not uniformly positive or negative. They conceptualise transformational leadership as a “double-edged sword” that can develop not only follower dependency, but also empowerment, for example.

Kark et al. (2003) also identify transformational leadership as an antecedent of follower dependency, but with personal identification with the leader operating as the underlying psychological mechanism through which this effect occurs. While transformational leadership generally could be regarded as a positive and even empowering leadership style, as already noted by Kollmann et al. (2013), Kark et al. (2003) finding further suggests that, under certain conditions, its effects may be more ambivalent. That is why personal identification with the leader is brought out in the Table 3, but as one of the possible mediating mechanism or explanatory condition rather than independent cause. In this context, strong personal identification means that by inspiring admiration and emotional attachment, transformational leaders encourage followers to define themselves in relation to the leader, which in turn increases their reliance on the leader for direction, meaning, and validation, thereby increasing dependency.

Positive leadership styles overall, for example such as inclusive and responsible leadership, are identified to cause follower dependency according to Han et al., 2023. citing Gu et al., 2017 and Guo et al., 2018. Although such leadership approaches are inherently positive and generally beneficial for employees, Han et al., 2023 findings again suggest that, in certain situations, they may also have unintended effects. Specifically, supportive and highly involved leaders can become central reference points for guidance, which encourages followers to rely on them more heavily rather than acting independently.

Servant leadership could be classified as a negative leadership style – even though the leader is investing a lot of energy and resources into employees, which is generally positive, prioritization of serving and sometimes over supporting followers could have negative effect on them. According to Zheng et al., 2024 it triggers follower dependency by encouraging followers to look to the leader for excessive support and repeated problem-solving. When leader's absolute support is perceived as constantly available, followers may become more comfortable delegating difficulties upward, which can gradually weaken their initiative and capacity to address issues independently. This dynamic is typically harmful for the leader, as will be discussed later on in the part about consequences of follower dependency. Moreover, the authors discuss dependence becoming collective, meaning that demands accumulate at the team level and place a sustained burden on the leader as team dependence.

Paek and Kakkar (2025) also discuss the nuanced effect of well-intended help from the leader. They show that when leaders repeatedly provide direct solutions instead of developing employees' problem-solving skills, followers may become used to turning to the leader rather than acting independently. When leaders consistently step in with ready-made

answers, followers may learn that seeking help is more efficient than engaging in their own analysis, which can gradually reduce their confidence in independent judgement and also sense of responsibility. Over time, this pattern may normalise upward delegation of thinking and decision-making, especially in complex or ambiguous tasks.

Moving on with negative leadership, Yang et al. (2021) argue that both constructive and destructive aspects of leader narcissism shape how followers perceive the leader, either as appealing or as controlling, hereby increasing followers' reliance on them. Authors do show that leader narcissism builds up followers' cognitive dependency mostly, but this effect is emphasised to be stronger under conditions of environmental uncertainty. Once again, that is why Environmental uncertainty is also among the causes in the Table 3, but as a contextual amplifier and not the cause alone.

Narcissistic leaders are explained to encourage greater reliance from employees, particularly in how followers interpret situations and make sense of their work environment. This dynamic can develop into a self-reinforcing cycle: follower admiration and dependency provide validation for the narcissistic leader, who in turn behaves in ways that further cultivate admiration and centralise sense-making around themselves, thereby deepening follower dependency. Environmental uncertainty, in turn, functions as a contextual condition that enhances the effect of leader narcissism on follower dependency. While uncertainty alone does not lead to dependency, it makes such dependency more likely or more intense by limiting followers' access to stable and reliable cues. In unstable environments characterised by rapid change, unclear priorities, or unpredictable outcomes, followers are more prone to look to the leader for sense-making and direction. In this way, environmental uncertainty does not "cause" dependency in the same direct manner as a certain leadership style, but rather amplifies the impact of leader-related factors, particularly leader narcissism, on followers' dependency.

Leader creativity is one more cause increasing follower dependency mentioned by Zhao et al., 2025. The research conducted shows that leader creativity can unintentionally increase followers' dependency on the leader, particularly in context of higher power distance. Specifically, they suggest that when a leader is perceived as highly creative, followers tend to view the leader as the main source of novel solutions and, most importantly, standards for what counts as "creative" work. This can make employees less confident in their own creative judgment and more likely to refer to the leader for direction and validation of their ideas. This dependency was proved to be stronger in teams with high power distance, those where unequal authority is seen as normal and team members hesitate to challenge or

act independently. In such situations, creative leaders are more likely to be seen as unquestionable experts, which deepen followers' cognitive and motivational reliance on them and reduces autonomous creative initiative.

As leader creativity can cause follower dependency, this dependency is then associated with certain effect on follower creativity in the reviewed literature. Therefore, the next part of this subchapter will focus on the empirical studies which identify the consequences of follower dependency. In Table 4 consequences reported in the reviewed studies are presented. This table was constructed based on the consequence-related keywords extracted from the initially created table for analysis of empirical studies, which can be found in the Appendix D. Then consequence-related keywords were coded to indicate which consequences were reported in each study.

Indeed, the most consistently reported consequence concerns employees' creativity and innovative behaviour, specifically their creative effort being reduced. More than half of the analysed studies report it as can be seen from the table. For example, Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) address well the influence one or another type of follower dependency has on followers' creativity. They argue that follower dependency negatively affects creativity through both cognitive and motivational mechanisms. This implies that cognitive dependency may restrict independent thinking and idea generation, while motivational dependency can orient followers' effort toward approval-seeking rather than exploration; in combination, they reduce autonomy and experimentation, which are central to creativity.

From the psychological perspective, dependent followers are more likely to prioritize security and conformity over risk-taking and experimentation. Because creative behaviour often involves the possibility of failure or deviation from established norms, dependency increases perceived psychological costs of proposing novel ideas. Followers may therefore withhold unconventional suggestions and avoid challenging dominant perspectives. In the author of this thesis's opinion, a diminished creative effort can be considered a central reported consequence of follower dependency in relation to follower creativity.

Han et al. (2023) findings show that follower dependency is associated with lower work passion and, consequently, also weaker employee innovative behaviour, which is consistent with the broader pattern other authors mentioned. In Han et al., 2023 model, work passion mediates the relationship between follower dependency and innovative behaviour. It is also indicated that good supervisor-subordinate guanxi (SSG) and leaders' interactive behaviour are associated with reduced follower dependency, which in return helps sustain employees' work passion and strengthens their innovative performance (Han et al., 2023). In

this way, as stated before already, follower dependency is treated less as a stand-alone phenomenon and more as a mechanism through which leadership behaviours and the quality of leader-follower interactions shape follower outcomes.

Table 4

Follower dependency consequences comparison

Author(s) & year	Employees' lower creativity and innovative behaviour	Employees' lower work passion	Increased leaders' emotional exhaustion
Eisenbeiß and Boerner, 2013	+	X	X
Han et al., 2023	+	+	X
Kark et al. 2003	X	X	X
Kollmann et al. 2013	+	X	X
Yang et al., 2021	+	X	X
Zhao et al., 2025	+	X	X
Zheng et al., 2024	X	X	+

Note: "+"- follower dependency causes the indicated consequence, "X"- not mentioned

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

Another consequence identified by Zheng et al., 2024 is increased leaders' emotional exhaustion, which again reflects a predominantly leader-centred treatment of follower dependency. Emotional exhaustion connects to the servant style of leadership: when leaders provide extensive support and consistently "serve" followers' needs, they may stimulate dependency. Over time, managing a dependent follower can become psychologically demanding, as it requires sustained attention, availability, and emotional resource to meet follower's expectations, thereby increasing the risk of emotional exhaustion. At the team level, dependence is even more draining for the leader, simply because it involves multiple dependent followers simultaneously.

Overall, the reviewed studies associate follower dependency with mostly negative outcomes, including reduced creativity and increased emotional strain on leaders, while suggesting that lowering dependency is necessary for more positive employee-related outcomes. However, it is important to stress that the implications of follower dependency

may also extend beyond creativity to other aspects of work behaviour, for example, individual and team performance, decision-making quality, job satisfaction etc.

Based on the reviewed empirical studies, the main causes and consequences of follower dependency, together with the types, are summarised in Figure 1.

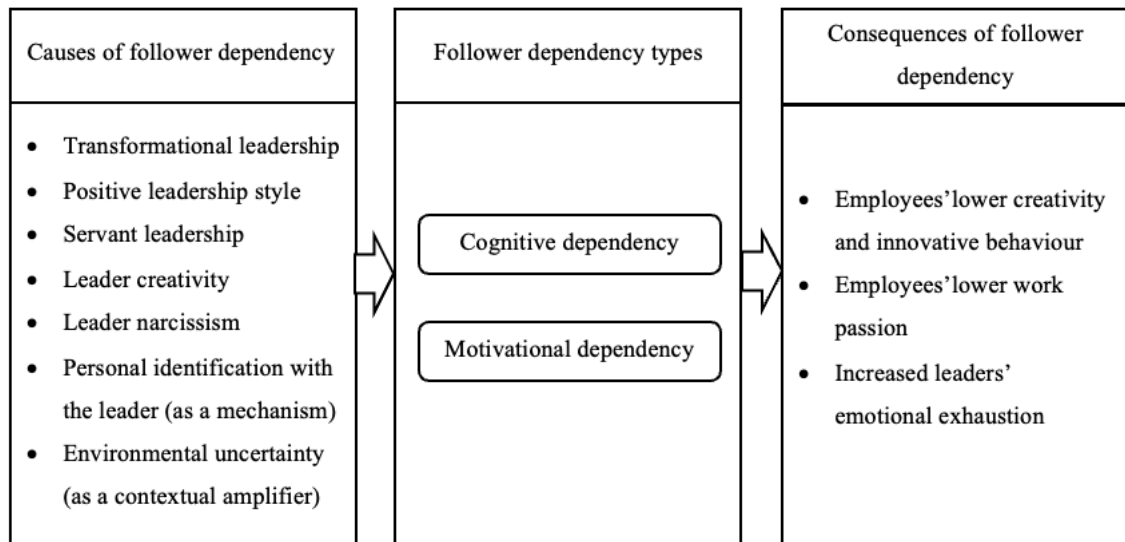


Figure 1: Theoretical framework of causes and consequences of follower dependency

Source: compiled by author based on the reviewed empirical studies

Accordingly, future research could broaden the empirical focus by examining how follower dependency shapes a wider range of individual and team outcomes, beyond leader-focused consequences, across different organisational and cultural settings, rather than concentrating largely on creativity-related effects. Given that empirical research on follower dependency is still relatively recent and limited, this represents a promising area for further investigation.

2. Empirical research on follower dependency, its causes and consequences in European corporate companies

2.1. Methodology of the empirical study

This subchapter will present the research methods used in the reviewed studies to investigate the concept of follower dependency. Also, the methodology which the author is going to use to conduct their empirical analysis will be discussed.

First part of this subchapter will focus on the methodological approaches used in the reviewed studies to examine the concept follower dependency. A table was created to provide an overview of the methodological approaches. This table, which describes methodological approaches in detail, can be found in Appendix E. It was based on the data extracted from the

initially created table for analysis of empirical studies, which can be found in the Appendix D, and some additional information, namely, regarding statistical methods.

As shown in the table in the Appendix E, all reviewed studies use quantitative research method, mostly survey-based, and apply validated Likert-type scales to measure follower dependency. Most studies use very similar measurement tools, adapting instruments developed by Kark et al. (2003) or Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013). Sample sizes range from small team-level datasets to large employee-leader samples across sectors including banking, high-tech, IT, insurance etc. From a statistical perspective, follower dependency is generally analysed as part of a larger model with other variables. Studies consistently apply factor-analytic methods, mostly confirmatory factor analysis, to ensure that the measures are valid and reliable. Several studies additionally use more advanced analytical methods.

Overall, the table shows that the studies use similar methodological approaches, while also confirming that follower dependency is most often examined as part of complex models.

The methodology of this study consists of the following parts: the literature review, survey design, survey distribution, data coding and variable construction, data analysis in SPSS, and the presentation and discussion of the results. The overall process is illustrated in the figure, which can be also found in the Appendix F.

Following the review and analysis of the existing literature on the topic, an online survey was developed. The follower dependency part of the survey was measured using the established scale developed by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013), while the leader-related causes and employee-related consequences were assessed through an author-developed keyword-based approach. The selected causes and consequences were partly derived from previous empirical studies on follower dependency and partly added by the author based on their theoretical relevance to leader-follower dependency. All survey measures had a 5-point Likert-type response format to maintain consistency. The survey items are detailed in Appendix G. The measurement scale developed by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) can be also found in the Appendix H.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked whether they were currently employed and whether they had a direct supervisor or manager to screen out individuals for whom the survey was not relevant. Before starting the survey, respondents were also informed about the purpose of the study, the expected time needed to complete the survey, and the fact that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that the collected data would be used only for the purposes of this Bachelor's thesis and analysed in aggregated

form. The survey was designed as an anonymous questionnaire: no names, email addresses, company names, or other directly identifying personal data were collected. Respondents gave their consent to participate in the study by continuing with the questionnaire. The data were stored securely and were accessible only to the author of the thesis and their supervisor.

As mentioned before, to measure follower dependency, a tool developed by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) was used in this study, capturing both cognitive and motivational types of dependency. This instrument has previously been applied in empirical studies on follower dependency (e.g., Yang et al., 2021; Han et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2025), which supports its relevance for the present study. It consists of 13 items that assess followers' cognitive and motivational dependency and is measured using a Likert-type response format.

In line with the aim of the thesis, the survey was designed to examine follower dependency together with its possible leader-related causes and employee-related consequences. The survey targeted employees rather than leaders, so it focused specifically on leader-related causes and employee-related outcomes. This approach was chosen because employees are perceived to be in a better position to assess their supervisors' behaviors and characteristics, as well as the effects of these dynamics on their own attitudes and behavior.

The author included 10 leader-related causes and 10 employee-related consequences. They were selected based on the reviewed literature on follower dependency and related leader-follower dynamics. For example, transformational leadership, servant leadership, leader creativity, and leader narcissism were included because they had been discussed in previous empirical studies as possible causes of follower dependency (Kark et al., 2003; Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013; Kollmann et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2024). Similarly, creativity/innovative behaviour and work passion were included because previous studies had linked follower dependency to these employee-related consequences (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013; Kollmann et al., 2013; Han et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2025). In addition, several other relevant aspects (e.g. leader feedback frequency for leader-related causes, work performance for employee-related consequences) were added by the author to broaden the empirical analysis of possible causes and consequences. These aspects were proposed by the author based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1, in which follower dependency and leader-follower interaction were discussed in relation to guidance, control, recognition, approval, autonomy, motivation, and work functioning. All causes and consequences were described using keywords that represent the concepts chosen by the author (3 per each). The reason was that most of these concepts are typically measured using established multi-item scales, which would have made the

survey too long. In addition, some full scales were not publicly accessible, and using only a few sample items from the literature might not have adequately captured the constructs. Therefore, the concepts were represented through concise keywords. The list of all included aspects for causes and consequences, the sources supporting the inclusion of each aspect, and the corresponding survey keywords are presented in Appendix G.

Several background variables were also included in the survey to describe the respondent sample and provide context for interpreting the findings. These variables included age, job position, years of experience in the current company, field of work, country of work, level of remote work, and frequency of interaction with the direct supervisor. They were not included as the main variables of the study, but rather as contextual indicators that help assess the composition and relevance of the sample. For example, age, job position, and years of experience provide information about respondents' demographic and organisational background, while field and country of work help describe the professional and geographical diversity of the sample. Similarly, remote work level and frequency of interaction with the supervisor are relevant because follower dependency is studied in the context of the employee-supervisor relationship, which may be shaped by how often and how employees communicate with their direct supervisor.

Before distributing the final survey, on April 6th, 2026, the author conducted a small pilot study with a group of 10 respondents to check the clarity, wording, length, and logical flow of the survey. Based on their feedback, several minor changes were made, including clearer wording of some items, improved ordering of questions, and small adjustments to the instructions to make the survey easier to complete. The pilot study helped ensure that the survey was understandable and practically suitable for the target respondents.

Next, the survey was distributed. The author reached out to a number of corporate companies from different business fields, which operate across the Baltic countries and Ukraine. Through personal connections, the survey was disseminated internally via organizational communication channels, such as email and corporate messaging platforms, on 13th April 2026. In addition, starting from 13th April 2026 the survey was distributed through some social media channels not connected to the companies contacted directly, to broaden the sample and mitigate the risk of limited internal dissemination in cases where the companies were unwilling or unable to share the survey. The survey was shared in WhatsApp and Telegram groups for students based in the Baltic countries and Ukraine. It was also shared via the University of Tartu newsletter, sent by email, allowing employed students from different companies and business fields to participate. The survey was also shared

through the author's LinkedIn profile, so employed individuals from different corporate companies, business fields, and European countries participated. To account for this diversity, the survey included an "Other" option for the country and field of work questions, and respondents had to specify them.

Across all distribution channels, respondents were informed that the survey was intended for individuals currently working in European corporate companies within business or professional fields. All respondents were also encouraged to forward it further, thereby contributing to a snowball sampling approach. The answers were collected until 3rd May 2026.

Sample characteristics are presented in the table, which can be found in Appendix I. The sample consists of 157 respondents working in different business and professional fields. It should be noted that the sample is biased towards younger employees, as the two largest age groups were 18-24 and 25-34, representing 36.9% and 38.9% of the sample, respectively. Therefore, the findings may reflect more strongly the experiences of younger or early-career employees, while follower dependency among older employees may differ due to longer work experience, stronger professional autonomy, more developed decision-making confidence, and different expectations toward supervisors.

Most respondents occupied either specialist/mid-level roles (47.8%) or entry-level/junior roles (36.3%), while 15.3% held management or leadership positions. This is also acknowledged as another limitation, as the sample mainly reflects office-based employees, especially those in mid-level and entry-level roles. Follower dependency may differ among employees in lower or higher positions or those engaged in physical or manual work, where supervision, autonomy, and reliance on direct instructions may be structured differently.

Regarding work experience in the current company, the largest groups had worked there for 1-3 years (35.7%) or less than one year (31.8%), indicating that the sample mainly consisted of employees with quite short tenure in their current organisations. This is consistent with the age structure of the sample, as younger employees are more likely to have shorter work experience in their current company. Therefore, the findings may reflect the experiences of employees who are still developing their professional autonomy and adapting to organisational expectations, and they cannot be generalised to the larger working population.

Furthermore, the sample is not limited to a single narrow sector or work arrangement, thereby strengthening the study's relevance across professional contexts to some level. The respondents represented a range of professional fields, with the largest shares working in

IT/technology/data (31.8%), finance/accounting/banking/insurance (19.7%), and business/consulting/professional services (17.2%). However, this should also be acknowledged as a limitation, since the sample is still concentrated mainly in economics-, business-, and IT-related office fields, while this study does not provide enough evidence about follower dependency in other fields such as, for example, construction, manufacturing, or other forms of physical and manual work. In other fields, follower dependency may differ because work tasks, hierarchy, level of autonomy, physical presence, and forms of supervision can be organised differently.

Geographically, the sample was concentrated mainly in Estonia (48.4%) and Ukraine (23.6%), but the inclusion of respondents from other European countries, specified in the note below Table 6, adds some broader comparative context. In terms of work format, the largest group worked in a hybrid arrangement (38.2%), followed by fully on-site work (22.9%) and mostly on-site work (17.2%). Finally, supervisor interaction was generally frequent, as 45.2% of respondents interacted with their supervisor several times a day and 31.8% several times a week. The dominance of hybrid work, along with the high frequency of supervisor interaction, is important: even though many respondents do not work fully on-site, most still communicate regularly with their supervisors.

After data collection, the responses were coded and analysed using SPSS. Firstly, descriptive statistics were calculated for the two formed composite variables, cognitive dependency and motivational dependency. This method was chosen to provide an overview of the general level of follower dependency in the sample, including the average tendency, variation, and range of responses. Following this, correlation analysis using Spearman's correlation coefficient was conducted to examine whether cognitive and motivational dependency were statistically associated with the selected leader-related causes and employee-related consequences. Spearman correlation was chosen because the survey data were based on Likert-type responses and the aim was to identify the direction and strength of associations between variables without assuming a normal distribution of data. The purpose of this analysis was not to prove causality, but to determine whether higher levels of cognitive or motivational dependency were connected with higher or lower ratings of specific leader-related and employee-related factors. The results were interpreted using a 0.05 significance level and were later compared with the theoretical discussion and previous empirical studies.

2.2. Results and discussion of the empirical study on follower dependency, its causes and consequences in European corporate companies

In this section, the results of the distributed survey will be analyzed and compared to those of previous empirical research.

As stated in the previous subchapter, the 13 survey items measuring follower dependency were taken from Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013), and the full list of items with their division into cognitive and motivational dependency is presented in Appendix H. After coding the responses on a 1-5 scale, two composite variables were constructed based on the factor structure presented by Eisenbeiß and Boerner. The first variable, cognitive dependency, was calculated as the average of Items 1-7, as these were the items specified by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) to measure cognitive dependency. Since Items 1 and 7 were phrased in the opposite direction and reflected independence rather than dependency, they were reverse-coded before calculating the average. The second variable, motivational dependency, was calculated as the average of Items 8-13, respectively. As a result, each of the 157 respondents received one value for cognitive dependency and one value for motivational dependency. After creating these two variables, descriptive statistics were calculated for each. Results can be found in Table 5 below.

Descriptive statistics analysis shows that both types of follower dependency are present at a moderate level among the respondents. The mean values are very similar: 2.55 for cognitive dependency and 2.61 for motivational dependency. Since the variables were measured on a 1-5 scale, where higher values indicate stronger dependency, these results suggest that respondents generally do not report very high dependency on their supervisors, but neither is dependency completely absent.

Considering the sample structure, this moderate level of cognitive and motivational dependency may be partly interpreted in relation to the relatively young and early-career profile of many respondents. Since many respondents were aged 18-34 and had worked in their current organisation for less than three years, some reliance on supervisors may reflect normal learning, adjustment, and professional development rather than clearly unhealthy dependency. Therefore, the results should be interpreted carefully, as follower dependency in this sample may partly overlap with ordinary supervisor guidance in early-career work settings. This also suggests that the boundary between necessary supervisor guidance and follower dependency may vary across contexts and is especially difficult to separate in early-career work settings. A careful balance between support and excessive reliance is needed.

To compare with previous empirical studies, for example, Han et al. (2023) reported a mean follower dependency value of 2.60 on a 5-point scale, which is almost identical to the results of the present study. Kollmann et al. (2013) reported a dependency mean of 2.50, but their study used a 7-point scale (1,79 on a 5-point scale), meaning that the level of dependency in their sample appears lower. By contrast, Zhao et al. (2025) reported a mean value of 3.295 on a 6-point scale (2,75 on a 5-point scale) for overall dependency on the leader, which suggests a very similar level to that in the present study. In Yang et al. (2021), where follower dependency was measured as cognitive dependency only, the reported mean was 4.12 on a 7-point scale (2.94 on a 5-point scale), indicating a similar level of cognitive dependency among respondents, too. However, these comparisons should be interpreted cautiously, because the studies used different scales, samples, and in some cases measured follower dependency as one overall construct, or only as cognitive dependency, rather than both cognitive and motivational dependency.

The median values are also close to the means: 2.57 for cognitive dependency and 2.67 for motivational dependency. This means that the distribution is relatively balanced and not strongly affected by extreme responses. The standard deviation is 0.56 for cognitive dependency and 0.76 for motivational dependency, showing that motivational dependency varies more strongly between respondents. In other words, employees differ more in the extent to which their motivation depends on their supervisor than in the extent to which their work functioning or decision-making depends on the supervisor.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of the studied variables

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Cognitive Dependency	2,55	2,57	,56	1	3,86
Motivational Dependency	2,61	2,67	,76	1	4,67

Note: N=157. Both variables were measured on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Higher values indicate stronger follower dependency.

Source: compiled by author

After the descriptive analysis, Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether cognitive dependency and motivational dependency were associated with the leader-related causes and employee-related consequences included in the survey. As each leader-related cause and employee-related consequence was represented by 3 author-selected keywords, the analysis examined associations at the level of individual keywords. Therefore, Spearman correlations were calculated separately between cognitive dependency and each

keyword, and between motivational dependency and each keyword. In total, the analysis included 20 concepts: 10 leader-related causes and 10 employee-related consequences.

The results of the correlation analysis are shown in the table in Appendix J, where significance values and correlation coefficients are reported for each keyword-level variable, and statistically significant relationships are marked with an asterisk.

According to the results, quite few leader-related causes were statistically associated with follower dependency, and all the correlation coefficients were weak, in the range between 0.1 and 0.3. This means the identified relationships should be interpreted carefully: not as strong effects, but rather as tendencies in this sample.

The most consistent pattern was found for transformational leadership. The keywords “motivating” (with the coefficient 0.169) and “inspiring” (with the coefficient 0.251) were positively and significantly associated with motivational dependency, while “development-oriented” (with the coefficients 0.172 and 0.229, respectively) was positively associated with both cognitive and motivational dependency. This suggests that employees who perceive their supervisor as motivating, inspiring, and focused on development tend to have higher dependency, especially motivational dependency. This finding is consistent with Kark et al. (2003), Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013), and Kollmann et al. (2013), who argued that transformational leadership may have a double-edged effect: while it can empower followers, it can also make the leader a central source of meaning, motivation, and direction in a potentially problematic way.

Leader creativity also showed some relevant relationship with follower dependency. The keyword “innovative” (with the coefficient 0.230) was positively and significantly associated with motivational dependency, while “original” (with the coefficient 0.160) was positively and significantly associated with cognitive dependency. This partly supports Zhao et al. (2025), who argued that creative leaders may unintentionally increase follower dependency by leading followers to see the leader as the primary, and even the only, source of creative standards and solutions. In the present study, this relationship suggests that highly innovative or original supervisors may serve as primary reference points for employees, both in how they function at work (cognitively) and in how they sustain motivation.

Leader expertise showed a relationship with motivational dependency only. The keywords “competent” (with the coefficient 0.229) and “knowledgeable” (with the coefficient 0.257) were positively and significantly associated with motivational dependency, although not with cognitive dependency. This suggests that employees who perceive their supervisor as competent and knowledgeable may also rely more on that supervisor as a

source of motivation or reassurance. This finding is meaningful because it shows that dependency may develop not only in relation to charismatic or transformational leaders, but also in relation to leaders who are perceived as professionally strong and knowledgeable. But since the relationship was found mainly with motivational dependency, leader expertise seems to be connected more with employees' motivational reliance than with direct cognitive reliance on the leader's thinking.

Dominating leadership showed only one significant relationship: the keyword "intimidating" (with the coefficient 0.180) was positively associated with motivational dependency. This suggests that when supervisors are perceived as intimidating, employees may become somewhat more motivationally dependent on them, possibly because their motivation becomes connected to pressure or fear of negative evaluation. However, since "dominating" and "pressuring" were not statistically significant, this result should be interpreted cautiously.

At the same time, several leader-related aspects that were expected to be relevant based on previous literature did not show statistically significant relationships with either cognitive or motivational dependency. Positive/supportive leadership and servant leadership were not significantly associated with dependency, as the keywords "supportive," "encouraging," "caring," "protective," "overinvolved," and "taking over" did not reach statistical significance. This suggests that, in the present sample, general support, care, or protection from the supervisor did not automatically translate into follower dependency. One possible explanation is that these behaviours may have been perceived by respondents as normal and helpful managerial support rather than as excessive involvement that limits autonomy. This is especially relevant considering the sample structure, where many respondents were young or early-career employees working mainly in business-, finance-, and IT-related office fields, where feedback, support, and regular interaction with supervisors may be common parts of professional development rather than signs of unhealthy reliance. Similarly, leader narcissism was not significantly related to follower dependency, as the keywords "self-centered," "attention-seeking," and "arrogant" showed no significant associations. This does not support Yang et al. (2021), who found that leader narcissism may increase cognitive dependency, especially under environmental uncertainty. However, in this sample, narcissistic characteristics may not have been perceived as attractive, legitimate, or professionally valuable enough to create reliance on the leader. It is also possible that the effect of narcissism depends on contextual factors such as power distance, uncertainty, or stronger hierarchical pressure, which were not directly measured in the present study. Finally,

leader feedback frequency, informal relationship with employees, and leader control/close supervision were also not significantly related to dependency. This indicates that frequent feedback, monitoring, approachability, informality, or close supervision do not necessarily create follower dependency by themselves. In this sample, such behaviours may instead reflect ordinary coordination practices in corporate office work, particularly in hybrid or team-based work settings where employees need regular communication with supervisors but may still preserve their own autonomy. Therefore, the non-significant results suggest that follower dependency may not emerge from general support, feedback, informality, or supervision alone, but rather from more specific leader characteristics that make the supervisor a central source of motivation, expertise, or direction. At the same time, these characteristics should not be interpreted in isolation, because one leader may combine several behaviours at once, and their effects may either reinforce or neutralise each other. Therefore, follower dependency may also depend on the combination of behaviours and characteristics through which employees experience the leader's role.

Moving to employee-related consequences, correlation coefficients were mostly weak to moderate, meaning that follower dependency was meaningfully but not as strongly associated with the following consequences.

One of the first and strongest findings concerns decision-making autonomy. Cognitive dependency was negatively and significantly associated with all three autonomy-related keywords: "independent" (with the coefficient -0.181), "autonomous" (with the coefficient -0.209), and "self-directed" (with the coefficient -0.257). Motivational dependency was also negatively and significantly associated with "autonomous" (with the coefficient -0.171) and "self-directed" (with the coefficient -0.232). This means that employees with higher dependency tend to describe themselves as less autonomous, less self-directed, and less independent. This is strongly consistent with the core definitions of follower dependency discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, especially Kark et al. (2003), who describe dependency as a condition in which followers have difficulty proceeding with work and making decisions without the leader's guidance.

A second strong pattern was found for reduced team functioning during leader absence. Both cognitive and motivational dependency were positively and significantly associated with being "less effective" (with the coefficients 0.342 and 0.405, respectively), "disorganized" (with the coefficients 0.284 and 0.279, respectively), and "slower" (with the coefficients 0.348 and 0.468, respectively) without the direct supervisor or manager. These were among the strongest correlation results, especially for motivational dependency and the

keyword “slower.” This means that employees with higher dependency are more likely to report that their work functioning decreases when the supervisor is absent. This finding directly supports the theoretical understanding of dependency as a condition in which the follower’s functioning becomes contingent on the leader. It also shows that follower dependency may affect employees’ ability to maintain work effectiveness in the leader’s absence. Importantly, this aspect has not been directly examined in the reviewed empirical literature. Therefore, this finding points to a novel and still evolving research area within follower dependency.

These results concerning decision-making autonomy and reduced team functioning during the supervisor’s absence are relevant to contemporary organisational contexts, such as holacracy-based structures and self-managing teams mentioned in Chapter 1.1, where employees are increasingly expected to work autonomously, make decisions, and coordinate with others without constant managerial guidance. Although this study did not directly examine such organisational forms, the findings suggest that follower dependency may become problematic in these modern work settings where autonomy and self-direction are required.

Knowledge sharing in the team was also negatively related to dependency. Cognitive dependency was significantly negatively associated with “sharing knowledge with colleagues” (with the coefficient -0.207) and “giving advice to colleagues” (with the coefficient -0.272), while motivational dependency was significantly negatively associated with “giving advice to colleagues” (with the coefficient -0.175). This suggests that more dependent employees may be less likely to act as independent sources of knowledge within the team. Instead, they may rely more heavily on the supervisor as the main source of knowledge. This result extends the existing empirical literature, which has focused mainly on creativity and innovative behaviour, by suggesting that follower dependency may also reduce employees’ contribution to collective learning and peer support.

The results for employees’ self-confidence and self-esteem also partly support the theoretical discussion. Cognitive dependency was negatively and significantly associated with being “confident” (with the coefficient -0.219), while motivational dependency was negatively and significantly associated with being “self-assured” (with the coefficient -0.174). This means that employees with higher dependency tend to report somewhat lower confidence or self-assurance. This corresponds to definitions that describe follower dependency as involving psychological reliance on the leader for psychological approval or validation. It also suggests that employees who rely more on their supervisor may feel less

confident in themselves at work. However, the keyword “trusting own judgment” was not significant, so the relationship between dependency and self-confidence is present but not fully consistent across all three keywords.

Once again, some employee-related consequences that were expected to be relevant based on the theoretical discussion did not show statistically significant relationships with both types of follower dependency. Most importantly, creativity/innovative behaviour and work passion/initiative were not significantly associated with either cognitive or motivational dependency, even though previous empirical studies often linked follower dependency to lower creativity, weaker innovative behaviour, or reduced work passion (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013; Kollmann et al., 2013; Han et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2025). In the present study, the keywords “creative,” “innovative,” “idea-generating,” “enthusiastic,” “proactive,” and “energetic” did not reach statistical significance. One possible explanation is that overall follower dependency in this sample may not have reached a level at which it becomes clearly harmful for creativity, innovative behaviour, or work passion. As the descriptive statistics showed, both cognitive and motivational dependency were present only at a moderate level. Considering relatively young and early-career profile of many respondents, this moderate dependency may partly overlap with normal learning, adjustment, and supervisor guidance rather than clearly unhealthy dependency. Therefore, respondents may have relied on their supervisors for guidance, feedback, or reassurance, but this reliance may have remained within a relatively normal range of leader-follower interaction. In this case, dependency may reduce some aspects of independent functioning, such as autonomy or effectiveness during the leader’s absence, without necessarily lowering employees’ creativity, initiative, or enthusiasm at work. Another possible explanation is the occupational context of the respondents. Since the sample included employees from different business and professional fields, some roles may have offered limited opportunities (and even requirements) for creativity, idea generation, or visible enthusiasm in everyday work. In addition, since many respondents were young or early-career employees, their current jobs may not yet reflect their long-term professional interests, meaning that work passion and initiative may have been shaped more by career stage and job fit than by follower dependency itself.

Job satisfaction, work performance, psychological safety/mental stability, and work-to-life interference were also not significantly related to follower dependency. This suggests that dependency in this sample is not strongly connected with the discussed work attitudes and general well-being consequences such as being satisfied, productive, psychologically

safe, or stressed outside work. These consequences are likely shaped by many other factors, such as workload, organisational culture, compensation, career opportunities, team climate, and personal circumstances, which were not measured in this study.

Overall, although only very few leader-related causes were associated with dependency, there were quite many consequences that occurred to be related to it. Some of them were already known from the existing literature, but there were also some differences from previous results, potentially due to the specifics of this sample – mostly young and early-career employees from mainly business-, finance-, and IT-related office fields. However, some novel aspects were also identified. In the following list, these more novel aspects as well as sample specific aspects are summarised:

- Follower dependency was moderate in this sample and may partly reflect normal supervisor guidance in early-career work settings, since many respondents were younger and had less than three years of tenure in their current organisations.
- There is a need for a balance to be found between normal guidance and unhealthy dependency, which may be different in different cases. The boundary between normal guidance and unhealthy dependency is especially difficult to separate for early-career young employees.
- Compared with previous studies, dependency in this sample was almost the same as in Han et al. (2023), higher than in Kollmann et al. (2013), but slightly lower than in Zhao et al. (2025) and Yang et al. (2021), although these comparisons should be interpreted cautiously, because of different scales, samples, and measurement approaches, and also because of the fact that there are still not enough previous empirical studies on follower dependency to make strong comparisons across different samples and contexts.
- Most significant correlations were rather weak, so the results should be interpreted as tendencies rather than strong effects. However, when several significant leader-related causes or employee-related consequences appear together, they may amplify each other.
- Transformational leadership factor also appeared in this sample as a double-edged factor: while motivating, inspiring, and development-oriented supervisors may empower followers, they can also be seen as a central source of meaning, motivation, and direction in a potentially problematic way.

- Dependency may develop not only in relation to charismatic or transformational leaders, but also in relation to leaders who are perceived as professionally strong and knowledgeable.
- Employees with higher dependency may experience difficulties in maintaining work effectiveness without the leader, and the more employees depend on their supervisor, the less they feel able to make decisions and work independently.
- These findings on reduced decision-making autonomy and weaker functioning without the supervisor suggest that follower dependency may become problematic in the modern, less hierarchical and more self-managing organisations, where self-direction is especially required from employees.
- Follower dependency is linked to lower knowledge sharing, suggesting that more dependent employees may contribute less to peer support and collective learning within the team.
- Follower dependency is connected to lower self-confidence, suggesting that employees who rely more on their supervisor may feel less psychologically sure of themselves at work.
- Creativity, innovative behaviour, and work passion were not associated to follower dependency in this sample. Possible reasons could be: dependency level was not strong enough; many business roles don't require or have no room for creativity; younger early-career employees may not yet be in roles aligned with their long-term career interests, which could influence their work enthusiasm independently of follower dependency.
- A leader may combine several behaviours at once, and their effects may either reinforce or neutralise each other. Therefore, follower dependency may also depend on the combination of behaviours and characteristics through which employees experience the leader's role, rather than only one characteristics.

Several limitations of the empirical study should also be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample was not fully representative of the wider working population, as it was biased towards younger and early-career employees, many of whom had relatively short tenure in their current organisations. Therefore, the findings may reflect the experiences of employees who are still developing professional autonomy, confidence, and work routines, while follower dependency among older or more experienced employees may differ. Secondly, the sample was concentrated mainly among office-based employees in IT, finance, business, and other

professional fields, meaning that the results cannot be generalised to physical, manual, industrial, construction, manufacturing, or other non-office work contexts, where supervision, hierarchy, autonomy, and reliance on direct instructions may be organised differently. Thirdly, although respondents came from several European countries, the sample was concentrated mainly in Estonia and Ukraine and was collected through personal contacts, social media, university channels, and snowball sampling, which limits the generalisability of the results. Although the study focuses on European corporate companies, it is also acknowledged that Europe is not culturally homogeneous. Differences between countries in leadership norms, hierarchy, power distance, and expectations toward supervisors may influence both the level of follower dependency and its causes and consequences. Since the present study did not compare respondents by country or test cultural differences directly, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting this specific sample rather than all European corporate employees in general. In addition, the study was based on self-reported survey data and correlation analysis, meaning that the findings show associations between variables but do not prove causal relationships. Finally, while follower dependency was measured using an established scale by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013), the selected causes and consequences were measured through author-developed keywords, which allowed the survey to remain concise but may not have captured all concepts in full detail.

Conclusion

This thesis examined follower dependency by first clarifying how the concept is understood in the literature and then summarising empirical studies of its potential causes and consequences. Overall, this work showed that follower dependency is still a relatively new and under-researched concept, which has not yet been treated in the literature as one fixed or fully independent construct. Most often, authors describe it through different lenses instead, including functional reliance, emotional need, cognitive guidance, and motivation, while also discussing it within broader leadership dynamics rather than as a central phenomenon in its own right. Moreover, the causes and especially the consequences of follower dependency for employees remain underexplored.

The first theoretical subchapter reviewed existing definitions and types of follower dependency. It was found that, despite variation in wording, most definitions share the same core idea: the follower's ability to act, decide, or stay motivated becomes dependent on the leader to some extent. At the same time, the review revealed clear weaknesses in current conceptualisations, especially the lack of a consistent distinction between healthy and unhealthy dependency and limited attention to modern contexts, especially less hierarchical

and more self-managing forms of organisations. The distinction between healthy and unhealthy dependency appeared to be relevant for young and early-career employees in particular, whose initial reliance on supervisors may be functional but can become unhealthy if it limits independence, confidence, or motivation. As for less hierarchical and more self-managing organisations, follower dependency appeared to be especially relevant, because excessive reliance on a leader may conflict with the autonomy and independent functioning expected from employees in such modern organisations. Based on the definitions and types discussed, the subchapter also introduced that the most common types are cognitive and motivational dependency. Subchapter ended with an integral definition of follower dependency proposed by the author.

The second theoretical subchapter synthesized the previous main empirical findings on the causes and consequences of follower dependency. The review showed that empirical research tends to focus more on leaders than on followers. Most identified causes were leader and leadership style related (e.g., transformational leadership, narcissism, servant leadership, leader creativity), while consequences, especially for employees, were very limited (only weaker creativity/innovative behaviour and work passion). This empirical evidence was quite narrow: the number of empirical studies was small, and many were based on specific samples from Asian countries, so the findings might not transfer directly to other organisational contexts, and especially to European countries.

The next subchapter explained the methodological direction for studying follower dependency, its causes and consequences empirically in this thesis. It first demonstrated how follower dependency was measured in previous empirical research. Then it specified that follower dependency, its causes and consequences in the present study were measured through online survey in European corporate companies, and for follower dependency specifically, measurement tool by Eisenbeiß and Boerner, 2013 was used. Selected leader-related causes and employee-related consequences were measured using keywords that represent the concepts. After collected sample data description and its analysis, the choice of Spearman correlation analysis was also explained as a suitable way to examine the relationships between cognitive and motivational dependency and the selected leader-related causes and employee-related consequences.

Finally, in the last subchapter, the results of Spearman correlation analysis together with the descriptive statistics analysis of follower dependency levels in the sample were presented, discussed and compared with previous empirical studies. As for dependency itself, specifically cognitive and motivational in this study, both were found at a moderate level in

the sample, with very similar mean values. This suggests that respondents did not report very high dependency on their supervisors, but dependency was still present to some extent. The results also showed that motivational dependency varied slightly more between respondents than cognitive dependency. Given the sample structure, in which many respondents were young, early-career employees, a moderate level could suggest a more normal learning-based reliance rather than signs of unhealthy problematic dependency. However, this interpretation should be treated cautiously, as there are still not enough previous empirical studies on follower dependency to make strong comparisons across different samples and contexts. For this reason, it is important to distinguish necessary guidance from unhealthy dependency generally, although this boundary may differ across cases. This distinction may be especially difficult for young and early-career employees who are still developing their professional independence.

Among leader-related causes, statistically significant relationships were found for transformational leadership, leader creativity, leader expertise, and, to a more limited extent, dominating leadership. This supports previous literature regarding follower dependency associated with transformational leadership and leader creativity, but also adds to it with less explored supervisor characteristics, such as perceived expertise and domination expressed through appearing intimidating. Especially, the transformational leadership factor proved in this sample to be a double-edged sword too: inspiring supervisors may empower followers, but they can also be seen as a central source of motivation and direction in a potentially problematic way. The non-significant results for this sample showed that follower dependency may not necessarily emerge from a supportive, overly involved, narcissistic, informal, and closely supervising or giving frequent feedback leader. Alternatively, it may depend on the overall combination of leader behaviours rather than on any single characteristic in isolation.

Regarding employee-related consequences, statistically significant relationships were found for decision-making autonomy, reduced team functioning during leader absence, knowledge sharing, and employees' self-confidence, to a more limited extent as well. These findings partly support the previous literature, because they confirm the general idea that follower dependency is connected with reduced independent functioning and decision-making. At the same time, they do not fully support previous empirical studies that mainly linked dependency to lower creativity, innovative behaviour, and work passion only, as these aspects were not significant in this study. A possible reason for this could be that since the level of both cognitive and motivational dependency in this sample was moderate, it was

somehow enough to affect followers' decision-making autonomy and functioning during leader absence, but not as strong to influence creativity, work passion and other aspects studied. Another possible explanation is that often for employees from different business and professional fields, creativity and innovative behaviour are not main everyday requirements, or they have no room or opportunities to express them. At the same time, many young early-career employees in this sample may not yet have been in jobs that fully reflected their long-term professional interests, so their level of enthusiasm may have been influenced more by job fit than by follower dependency itself.

Nevertheless, an important contribution here is suggesting that follower dependency may also reduce employees' willingness to actively share their knowledge and contribute to collective learning. Result of lower self-confidence, although more limited, further suggests that follower dependency may also affect not only how employees make decisions, but also how secure they feel in their own judgment at work, which was not fully studied before. The non-significant results for this sample could possibly suggest, once again, that a moderate dependency level was not enough to influence the already mentioned earlier aspects, but also job satisfaction, work performance, psychological safety, and work-life balance of employees. Or they could also be potentially shaped by other factors, such as, for example, workload, compensation, career opportunities, team climate, and even personal circumstances, which were not studied in this thesis.

In the end of the last subchapter, limitations of this study were also explained.

This topic could be potentially advanced in future studies by comparing follower dependency across different European countries and cultural contexts, especially by examining whether leadership norms, power distance, and expectations toward managerial authority in different European countries shape the causes and consequences of dependency in different ways as well. Future research could also examine follower dependency among more experienced employees whose professional autonomy, confidence, and decision-making patterns are already expected to be developed. This could make it possible to understand whether follower dependency is mainly connected to early-career adjustment or whether it can also appear among employees who already have stable work routines and established professional independence. Another important direction would be to study follower dependency fully in other, more modern organizational structures, such as more self-managing organizations with a flatter hierarchy. Additionally, future research could expand this topic by studying employee-related causes and leader-related consequences of follower dependency instead. This would allow to examine whether dependency is also influenced by

employees' own characteristics, professional experience, confidence, expectations etc., and whether it also creates some consequences for leaders, rather than only for followers.

Finally, future research could examine how the growing use of AI tools at work may transform follower dependency. AI may reduce employees' dependency on supervisors by providing immediate access to some information, explanations, feedback, and task support. At the same time, it may create a new form of dependency, where employees rely less on leaders but more on AI tools for thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, or confidence in their work. Therefore, future studies could investigate whether AI weakens traditional leader-based follower dependency or instead potentially shifts cognitive and motivational dependency from supervisors to digital tools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Keywords derived from “Follower Dependency” definitions

Author(s)	Definition	Keyword
Birtchnell et al. (1988) as cited in Han et al 2023, p. 3	“Birtchnell et al. (1988) argue that a dependent person needs to receive recognition, guidance, and guidance from others in order to make up for their shortcomings and, more importantly, to accept, endorse, and advocate for the values of others.”	Recognition, guidance, values of others, shortcomings
Horwitz 2023, p. 26	“..it can lead to choosing a highly polarizing, insensitive leader and even promote follower dependency that only becomes evident after a period of their leadership has passed”.	Polarizing leader, follower dynamics, delayed recognition
Kark et al., 2003; Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984 as cited in Zhao et al 2025, p. 3	“Dependency on leader is defined as a psychological state that can be activated by contextual factors (Kark et al., 2003; Kets De Vries & Miller, 1984)”	Psychological state, contextual factors
Kark et al 2003, p 246	“Dependence on the leader has several manifestations. It implies that the subordinate is limited in his or her ability to proceed with work and make decision without the leader’s guidance. Psychologically it means that the subordinate’s motivation and self-esteem depend on receiving recognition and approval from the leader.”	Limited autonomy, leader’s guidance, recognition, approval
Kets de Vries, 1988 as Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8	“..regarding protection and security by idealized authority figures, dependency on them may accrue”.	Protection, security, authority figures
Sheppard & Sherman 1998, p. 424	"simple dependence" is said to occur when one's outcomes are contingent upon the actions of another”	Outcomes contingent, actions of another
Wee et al 2017, p.1	“Because of this, followers often find themselves in situations where they are asymmetrically dependent on their leaders for these valued goals and resources (Gargiulo, Ertug, & Galunic, 2009).”	Asymmetrical relation, valued goals, resources
Yukl, 1998 as cited in Kollmann et al. 2013, p. 8	“..become dependent on the leader for guidance and inspiration (Yukl, 1998)”.	Guidance, inspiration

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

APPENDIX B

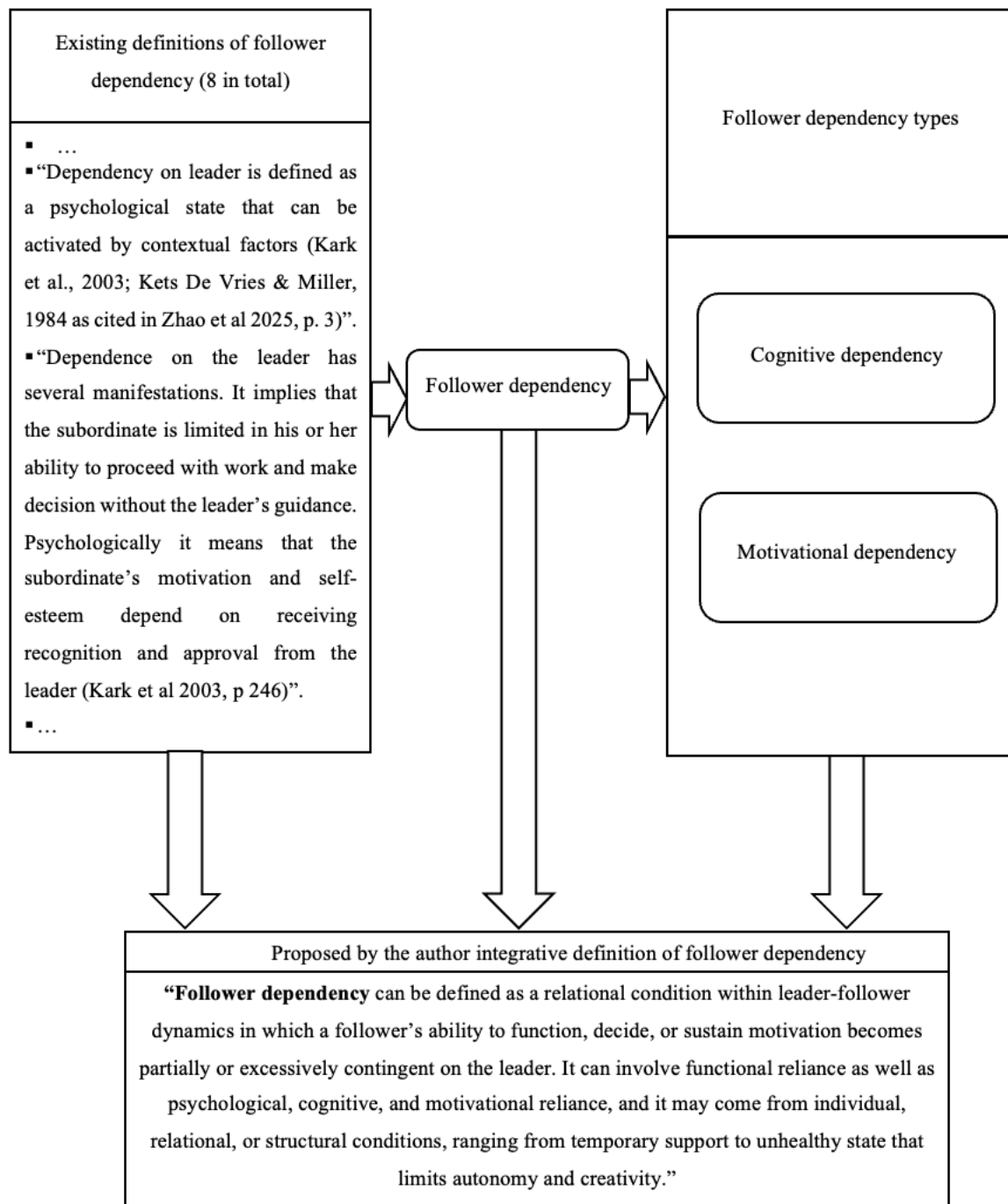
Keywords derived from “Follower Dependency” types of definitions

Sources	Definition	Keywords
Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) as cited in Yang et al., (2021)	Cognitive dependency is a dimension of follower dependency. Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013) pointed out that subordinate dependency includes two components: cognitive dependency and motivation dependency.	Cognitive processes, motivational processes
Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013)	Addressing this call, we argue that follower dependency influences creativity negatively via both cognitive and motivational processes. Similarly, Gu et al. (2016) divided	Creativity, cognitive process, motivational process Information
Gu et al. (2016) as cited in Yang et al., (2021)	subordinates' dependency into two dimensions and defined cognitive dependency as the dependence of employees on the leader through information processing activities such as feeling, perceiving, remembering, imaging and thinking.	processing, feeling, perceiving, thinking, imagining, remembering

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

APPENDIX C

Conceptualisation of follower dependency based on existing definitions and typology



Source: compiled by author based on the sources presented in Table 1 and Appendix B

APPENDIX D

Empirical studies overview with keywords

Source	Cause	Consequence	Method	Measurement tool	Sample	Results
Han et al 2023	positive leadership style; follower dependency	good SSG; interactive behaviour; reduced dependency	quantitative; online questionnaire	Silke 2013; 6 items; follower dependency; 5-point Likert	China; 305; hi-tech firms	Good SSG reduced follower dependency; increased EIB; work passion as mediator
Zhao et al 2025	Leader creativity	dependency on leader; follower creativity; creative effort	quantitative; hard-copy surveys	Eisenbeiß & Boerner 2013; 8 items; cognitive (4); motivational (4); 6-point Likert	China; 136 leaders; 691 followers; IT firms; insurance firm	leader creativity increased dependency; reduced follower creativity indirectly
Kark et al 2003	transformational leadership; identification mechanisms	dependence; empowerment	quantitative; standardized questionnaires	Kark et al. 2003; 8 items; follower dependence; Likert scale.	Israel; banking sector; 888 employees; 76 managers	transformational leadership related to dependence and empowerment; personal identification as mediator
Kollmann et al. 2013	transformational leadership; dependency needs	dependency; employee creativity	quantitative; online survey	Kark et al. 2003; 8 items; individual dependency; 7-point Likert	Germany; 271 employees	transformational leadership increased dependency; dependency negatively affected creativity
Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013)	transformational leadership	dependency; follower creativity	quantitative; web-based survey	Eisenbeiß & Boerner 2013; 13 items; cognitive; motivational; 7-point Likert	Germany-based; R&D employees; 416; high-tech industries	transformational leadership increased dependency; dependency negatively related to creativity
Yang et al., (2021)	leader narcissism; bright and dark sides	cognitive dependency; innovative behavior	quantitative; field study; online survey; multisource	Gu 2016; Eisenbeiß & Boerner 2013; 4 items; cognitive; 7-point Likert	China; 266 employees; supervisors ; high-tech firms	cognitive dependency mediated leader narcissism and innovative behavior; environmental uncertainty strengthened effect
Zheng et al 2024	servant leadership	team dependence; leader	quantitative; on-site hard-copy surveys	Kark et al. 2003; 5 items; team	China; 83 leaders; 302 team	servant leadership increased team

Source	Cause	Consequence	Method	Measurement tool	Sample	Results
		emotional exhaustion		dependence; Likert scale	members; internet; manufacturing	dependence; team dependence increased emotional exhaustion

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

APPENDIX E

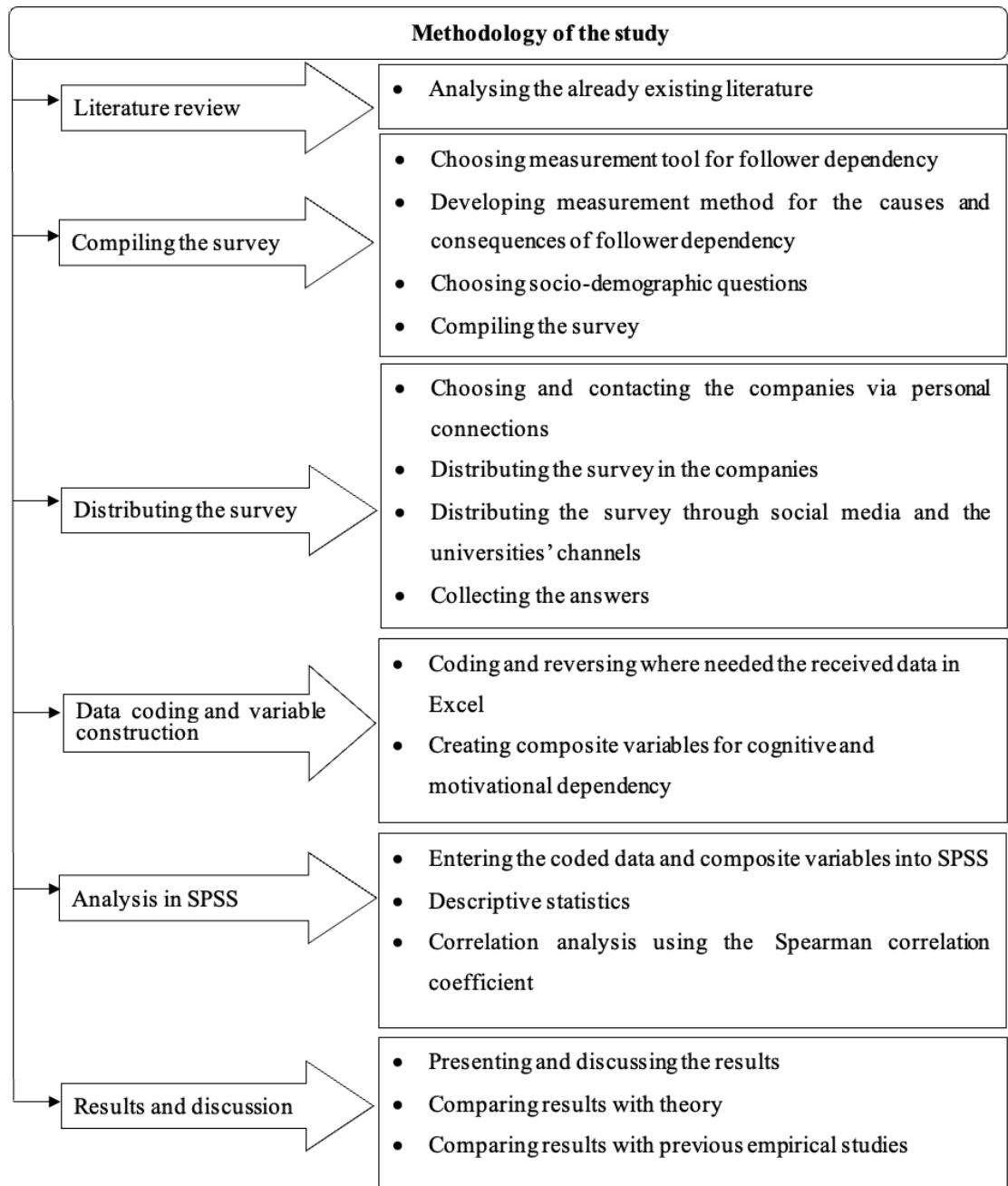
Methodological approaches in empirical studies on follower dependency

Author(s) & year	Research method	Measurement	Sample	Statistical method
Eisenbeiß and Boerner, 2013	Quantitative	Eisenbeiß & Boerner (2013), two factors (cognitive and motivational), 13 items, 7-point Likert scale	416 employees in R&D/high-tech sectors	Principal Components Analysis (PCA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)
Han et al., 2023	Quantitative	Eisenbeiß & Boerner (2013), joint dependence, no factors; 6 items, 5-point Likert scale	305 employees from hi-tech firms in different sectors	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Reliability analysis, Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Regression and mediation analysis
Kark et al. 2003	Quantitative	Kark et al. (2003), joint dependence, no factors; 8 items, 7-point Likert scale	888 employees, 76 branch managers in banking sector	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Random Coefficient Models (RCM), Linear Mixed Effects models
Kollmann et al. 2013	Quantitative	Kark et al. (2003), joint dependence, no factors; 8 items, 7-point Likert scale	271 employees from social network platform for business professionals	Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with Promax rotation, Reliability and validity tests, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)
Yang et al., 2021	Quantitative	Gu et al. (2016) adapted from Eisenbeiß & Boerner (2013), only cognitive factor, 4 items, 7-point Likert scale	266 employees from 11 high-tech firms in different sectors	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), A four-factor model, Common method variance tests
Zhao et al., 2025	Quantitative	Eisenbeiß & Boerner (2013), two factors (cognitive and motivational), 8 items, 6-point Likert scale	136 leaders, 691 employees in 4 firms in IT and insurance sectors	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Common method variance (supplementary)
Zheng et al., 2024	Quantitative	Kark et al. (2003), joint dependence, no factors; 5 items; Likert scale	83 team leaders and 302 team members in internet & manufacturing sectors	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Aggregation and variance testing (for team-level measurement)

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table

APPENDIX F

Methodology of the study



Source: compiled by author

APPENDIX G

Survey

The aspect to measure	Source that confirms the importance of this aspect	How it is measured (i.e., where the survey items come from).
<i>Screening questions</i>		
<i>Being employed at the moment of filling out this survey</i>	-	Are you currently employed?
<i>Having a direct manager/supervisor</i>	-	Do you currently have a direct supervisor or manager at work?
<i>Follower dependency</i>		
<i>Causes of follower dependency (leader-related)</i>		
<i>Transformational leadership</i>	Eisenbeiß and Boerner, 2013; Kark et al. 2003; Kollmann et al. 2013; <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Motivating</u> <u>Inspiring</u> <u>Development-oriented</u>
<i>Positive/supportive leadership</i>	Gu et al., 2017 and Guo et al., 2018 ; <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Supportive</u> <u>Encouraging</u> <u>Caring</u>
<i>Servant leadership</i>	Zheng et al., 2024; <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Protective</u> <u>Overinvolved</u> <u>Taking over</u>
<i>Leader creativity</i>	Zhao et al., 2025; <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Creative</u> <u>Innovative</u> <u>Original</u>
<i>Leader narcissism</i>	Yang et al., 2021; <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Self-centered</u> <u>Attention-seeking</u> <u>Arrogant</u>

The aspect to measure	Source that confirms the importance of this aspect	How it is measured (i.e., where the survey items come from).
<i>Leader feedback frequency</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Giving frequent feedback</u> <u>Evaluative</u> <u>Monitoring</u>
<i>Informal relationship with employees</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Friendly</u> <u>Informal</u> <u>Approachable</u>
<i>Leader expertise</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Competent</u> <u>Knowledgeable</u> <u>Experienced</u>
<i>Leader control/close supervision</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Controlling</u> <u>Supervising closely</u> <u>Checking frequently</u>
<i>Dominating leadership</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe your direct supervisor or manager (5 point scale): <u>Intimidating</u> <u>Dominating</u> <u>Pressuring</u>
<i>Consequences of follower dependency (employee-related)</i>		
<i>Creativity/innovative behaviour</i>	Eisenbeiß and Boerner, 2013; Han et al., 2023; Kollmann et al. 2013; Yang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2025. <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Creative</u> <u>Innovative</u> <u>Idea-generating</u>
<i>Work passion/initiative</i>	Han et al., 2023; <i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Enthusiastic</u> <u>Proactive</u> <u>Energetic</u>
<i>Decision-making autonomy</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe

The aspect to measure	Source that confirms the importance of this aspect	How it is measured (i.e., where the survey items come from).
		you in your current work situation. (5 point scale):
		<u>Independent</u> <u>Autonomous</u> <u>Self-directed</u>
<i>Job satisfaction</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Satisfied with work</u> <u>Content with work</u> <u>Happy at work</u>
<i>Work performance</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Productive</u> <u>Effective</u> <u>Efficient</u>
<i>Psychological safety/mental stability</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Feeling safe to speak up</u> <u>Feeling comfortable expressing opinions</u> <u>Being not afraid of making mistakes</u>
<i>Knowledge sharing in the team</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Sharing knowledge with colleagues</u> <u>Helpful to colleagues</u> <u>Giving advice to colleagues</u>
<i>Reduced team functioning during leader absence</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Being less effective without direct supervisor or manager</u> <u>Disorganized without direct supervisor or manager</u> <u>Slower without direct supervisor or manager</u>
<i>Work-to-life interference</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale):

The aspect to measure	Source that confirms the importance of this aspect	How it is measured (i.e., where the survey items come from).
		<u>Experiencing work-related stress outside work</u> <u>Feeling that work negatively affects personal life</u> <u>Finding it hard to switch off from work</u>
<i>Employees' self-confidence/self-esteem</i>	<i>Based on keywords</i>	Please indicate to what extent the following words describe you in your current work situation. (5 point scale): <u>Confident</u> <u>Self-assured</u> <u>Trusting own judgment</u>
<i>Background information</i>		
<i>Age</i>	-	Item: Please indicate your age.
<i>Field of work</i>	-	Item: Please indicate the field in which you currently work.
<i>Years of experience</i>	-	Item: Please indicate how long you have been working in your current organisation.
<i>Position level</i>	-	Item: What is your position level?
<i>Country of work</i>	-	Item: Please indicate the country where you currently work.
<i>How often an employee interacts with their supervisor/manager in person</i>	-	Item: Please indicate your level of remote work.
<i>How often an employee interacts with their supervisor/manager generally</i>	-	Item: How often do you interact with your direct supervisor or manager?
<i>Suggestions from respondents</i>	-	Item: If there is anything else you would like to mention that was not included in this survey, please write it below.

Source: Compiled by author based on the sources presented in the table and author's design of the survey items.

Note: Items marked as "based on keywords" were developed by author to represent the selected concepts in a concise survey format. All keyword-based items were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

APPENDIX H

Measurement tool for follower dependency by Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013)

Factor	Item	Survey item
Cognitive dependency (items 1-7)	1	I feel I can function well at work, irrespective of who is the direct supervisor.
	2	I find it difficult to function without my direct supervisor's guidance.
	3	I feel I can do my job better when my direct supervisor is around.
	4	If my direct supervisor were replaced, I would feel I do not have anyone to give me advice.
	5	I don't question my direct supervisor's orders.
	6	I accept my direct supervisor's viewpoints and do not challenge them.
	7	Before carrying out my direct supervisor's orders, I think over if they are reasonable.
Motivational dependency (items 8-13)	8	If my direct supervisor were to leave, my commitment to work would decline.
	9	If my direct supervisor were to leave, my motivation would decline.
	10	When my direct supervisor goes on vacation, my readiness to work overtime decreases.
	11	When my direct supervisor goes on vacation, my enthusiasm for work deteriorates.
	12	At work it is important for me to receive praise from my direct supervisor.
	13	At work I strive to win my direct supervisor's recognition.

Source: Eisenbeiß and Boerner (2013)

APPENDIX I

Sample characteristics

Variable	Category	Distribution	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	18-24	58	36,9
	25-34	61	38,9
	35+	38	24,2
Job Position	Entry level/junior role	57	36,3
	Specialist/mid-level role	75	47,8
	Management/leadership role	24	15,3
	Other	1	0,6
Years of experience with the current company	Less than 1 year	50	31,8
	1-3 years	56	35,7
	4-6 years	32	20,4
	7-9 years	6	3,8
	10 years or more	13	8,3
Field of work	Business / consulting / professional services	27	17,2
	Finance / accounting / banking / insurance	31	19,7
	Marketing / sales / communications	24	15,3
	Policy / public policy / development	4	2,5
	Project management / operations / administration	14	8,9
	IT / technology / data	50	31,8
	Other	7	4,5
Country of work	Ukraine	37	23,6
	Estonia	76	48,4
	Latvia	2	1,3
	Lithuania	8	5,1
	Other	34	21,7
Level of remote work	Fully on-site	36	22,9
	Mostly on-site	27	17,2
	Hybrid	60	38,2
	Mostly remote	20	12,7
	Fully remote	14	8,9
Supervisor interaction frequency	Several times a day	71	45,2
	Once a day	14	8,9
	Several times a week	50	31,8
	Once per week	10	6,4
	Two-three times a month	8	5,1
	Once a month or less	4	2,5

Note: N = 157. Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. In the country of work variable, the "Other" category includes Italy (7), Germany (6), Spain (3), Slovenia (3), Belgium (2), Sweden (2), Norway (2), the UK (2), Slovakia (2), the Netherlands (2), Austria (1), Czech Republic (1), and Finland (1).

Source: Compiled by author based on survey results

APPENDIX J

Results of the correlation analysis

	Key words	Cognitive Dependency (sig. value)	Cognitive Dependency (coefficient)	Motivational Dependency (sig. value)	Motivational Dependency (coefficient)
<i>Leader-related causes</i>					
<i>Transformational leadership</i>	Motivating	0.127	0.122	0.035*	0.169
	Inspiring	0.055	0.154	0.002*	0.251
	Development-oriented	0.031*	0.172	0.004*	0.229
<i>Positive/supportive leadership</i>	Supportive	0.405	0.067	0.062	0.149
	Encouraging	0.478	0.057	0.533	0.050
	Caring	0.089	0.136	0.076	0.142
<i>Servant leadership</i>	Protective	0.085	0.138	0.172	0.109
	Overinvolved	0.219	-0.099	0.677	-0.034
	Taking over	0.508	-0.053	0.869	0.013
<i>Leader creativity</i>	Creative	0.155	0.114	0.058	0.152
	Innovative	0.195	0.104	0.004*	0.230
	Original	0.045*	0.160	0.086	0.137
<i>Leader narcissism</i>	Self-centered	0.418	-0.065	0.901	-0.010
	Attention-seeking	0.112	-0.127	0.813	-0.019
	Arrogant	0.200	0.103	0.317	0.080
<i>Leader feedback frequency</i>	Giving frequent feedback	0.494	-0.055	0.479	0.057
	Monitoring	0.175	0.109	0.319	0.080
	Evaluative	0.097	0.133	0.115	0.126
<i>Informal relationship with employees</i>	Friendly	0.713	-0.030	0.468	0.058
	Informal	0.511	0.053	0.156	0.114
	Approachable	0.248	-0.093	0.369	0.072
<i>Leader expertise</i>	Competent	0.121	0.124	0.004*	0.229
	Knowledgeable	0.229	0.097	0.001*	0.257
	Experienced	0.288	0.085	0.075	0.142
<i>Leader control/close supervision</i>	Controlling	0.629	0.039	0.988	0.001
	Supervising closely	0.969	0.003	0.436	0.063
	Checking frequently	0.492	0.055	0.532	0.050
<i>Dominating leadership</i>	Intimidating	0.191	0.105	0.024*	0.180
	Dominating	0.136	0.119	0.293	0.084
	Pressuring	0.633	0.038	0.061	0.150
<i>Employee-related consequences</i>					
<i>Creativity / innovative behaviour</i>	Creative	0.250	-0.092	0.546	-0.049
	Innovative	0.091	-0.135	0.499	-0.054
	Idea-generating	0.316	-0.081	0.672	-0.034
<i>Work passion/initiative</i>	Enthusiastic	0.559	-0.047	0.835	0.017
	Proactive	0.189	-0.105	0.454	-0.060
	Energetic	0.497	-0.055	0.938	0.006

	Key words	Cognitive Dependency (sig. value)	Cognitive Dependency (coefficient)	Motivational Dependency (sig. value)	Motivational Dependency (coefficient)
<i>Decision-making autonomy</i>	Independent	0.023*	-0.181	0.206	-0.102
	Autonomous	0.008*	-0.209	0.032*	-0.171
	Self-directed	0.001*	-0.257	0.003*	-0.232
<i>Job satisfaction</i>	Satisfied with work	0.910	-0.009	0.447	0.061
	Content with work	0.218	-0.099	0.967	0.003
	Happy at work	0.892	0.011	0.388	0.069
<i>Work performance</i>	Productive	0.200	-0.103	0.574	-0.045
	Effective				
	Efficient	0.090	-0.136	0.661	-0.035
<i>Psychological safety/mental stability</i>	Feeling safe to speak up	0.635	-0.038	0.617	0.040
	Feeling comfortable expressing opinions	0.087	-0.137	0.969	-0.003
	Being not afraid of making mistakes	0.231	-0.096	0.270	-0.089
<i>Knowledge sharing in the team</i>	Sharing knowledge with colleagues	0.009*	-0.207	0.112	-0.127
	Helpful to colleagues	0.138	-0.119	0.657	-0.036
	Giving advice to colleagues	0.000*	-0.272	0.029*	-0.175
<i>Reduced team functioning during leader absence</i>	Being less effective without direct supervisor or manager	0.000*	0.342	0.000*	0.405
	Disorganized without direct supervisor or manager	0.000*	0.284	0.000*	0.279
	Slower without direct supervisor or manager	0.000*	0.348	0.000*	0.468
<i>Work-to-life interference</i>	Experiencing work-related stress outside work	0.358	-0.074	0.691	-0.032
	Feeling that work negatively affects personal life	0.652	0.036	0.783	0.022
	Finding it hard to switch off from work	0.308	-0.082	0.674	-0.034

	Key words	Cognitive Dependency (sig. value)	Cognitive Dependency (coefficient)	Motivational Dependency (sig. value)	Motivational Dependency (coefficient)
<i>Employees' self-confidence/self-esteem</i>	Confident	0.006*	-0.219	0.120	-0.125
	Self-assured	0.135	-0.120	0.029*	-0.174
	Trusting own judgment	0.697	0.031	0.861	0.014

Source: Compiled by the author based on survey data collected and processed in SPSS.

Note: All survey items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The correlation coefficient refers to Spearman's rho; the sig. value refers to the p-value. * indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Resümee

TÖÖTAJATE JUHIST SÕLTUVUSE PÕHJUSED JA TAGAJÄRJED EUROOPA ÄRIETTEVÖTETES

Anastasiia Horbachova

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on välja selgitada juhiste sõltuvuse põhjused ja tagajärjed mitmete Euroopa riikide äriettevõtete erinevate valdkondade ja ametitega töötajate hulgas analüüsid juhiste sõltuvuse seost liidrist tulenevate põhjustega ja järgijatele põhjustatud tagajärgedega. Teema on oluline, sest paljudes organisatsioonides eeldatakse töötajatelt autonoomiat, algatusvõimet ja iseseisvat otsustusvõimet, kuid samal ajal sõltuvad nad siiski juhiste juhendamise, tagasiside, toe ja vajalikele ressurssidele ligipääsu osas. See teema on eriti asjakohane noorte ja karjääri alguses olevate töötajate puhul, kelle professionaalne enesekindlus ja iseseisvus on alles kujunemas. Vähem hierarhilistes ja enam isejuhtivates organisatsioonides võib liigne sõltuvus juhiste samuti probleemseks osutuda, kuna töötajatelt eeldatakse iseseisvat tegutsemist ja otsustamist ilma pideva juhtkonnapoolse suunamiseta.

Töö uurimislünk seisneb selles, et töötajate juhiste sõltuvust on seni uuritud enamasti kaudselt, peamiselt laiema juhtimisuuringute konteksti osana, mitte eraldiseisva nähtusena. Olemasolevad uuringud annavad juhiste sõltuvuse põhjustest ja tagajärgedest killustatud arusaama, keskenduvad valdavalt juhtidele ning põhinevad sageli Aasia valimitel. Seetõttu on vähem teada töötajate juhiste sõltuvusest Euroopa ärimaailma kontekstis, eriti selle tagajärgedest töötajatele. Uurimisülesanded olid lühidalt öeldes analüüsida olemasolevaid töötajate juhiste sõltuvuse definitsioone ja liike, anda ülevaade varasematest empiirilistest uuringutest, koguda ja analüüsida küsitlusandmeid ning võrrelda saadud empiirilisi tulemusi varasemate uuringutega.

Esimene teoreetiline alapeatükk näitas, et töötajate juhiste sõltuvust võib üldiselt mõista seisundina, milles töötaja võime tegutseda, otsustada või säilitada motivatsiooni muutub sõltuvaks juhiste. Samuti toodi välja kognitiivne ja motivatsiooniline sõltuvus kui juhiste sõltuvuse peamised liigid. Alapeatükk näitas, et olemasolevad definitsioonid ei erista piisavalt hästi „tervislikku“ ja „ebatervislikku“ sõltuvust, kuigi see eristus on oluline noorte töötajate ja tänapäevaste vähem hierarhiliste organisatsioonide puhul. Teine teoreetiline alapeatükk näitas, et varasemad empiirilised uuringud on seostanud töötajate juhiste sõltuvust peamiselt juhiga seotud teguritega, nagu ümberkujundav eestvedamine, juhi nartsissism ja juhi loovus. Samas on varasemates uuringutes käsitletud tagajärjed olnud piiratud,

keskendudes peamiselt madalamale loovusele, innovatiivsele käitumisele, töökirele ja juhtide emotsionaalsele kurnatusele. Käesolevas töös uuritakse laiemat ringi põhjuseid ja tagajärgi.

Empiiriline osa põhines veebiküsitlusel, milles osales 157 Euroopa äriettevõtetes töötavat vastajat. Töötajate juhust sõltuvust mõõdeti kognitiivse ja motivatsioonilise sõltuvuse kaudu, kasutades Eisenbeißi ja Boerner (2013) mõõdikut ning põhjuseid ja tagajärgi mõõdeti teoreetilisel osal põhinevate autori poolt valitud märksõnapõhiste väidete abil.

Muutujatevaheliste seoste analüüsimiseks kasutati Spearmani korrelatsioonianalüüsi.

Tulemused näitasid, et nii kognitiivne kui ka motivatsiooniline sõltuvus esinesid valimis mõõdukal tasemel ehk juhust sõltuvus antud valimis on mõõdukas ja ootuspärane noorte valimi kohta. Statistiliselt olulised juhiga seotud seosed ilmnisid ümberkujundava eestvedamise, juhi loovuse, juhi ekspertsuse ja nõrgemal määral domineeriva juhtimise puhul. Tagajärgede osas oli töötajate juhust sõltuvus seotud madalama otsustusautonoomia, nõrgema toimetulekuga juhi puudumisel, väiksema teadmiste jagamisega ning osaliselt madalama enesekindlusega. Praktilisest vaatenurgast võivad need tulemused aidata juhtidel, tiimijuhtidel ja personalispetsialistidel pakkuda töötajatele vajalikku tuge ilma liigset juhust sõltuvust kujundamata, eriti noorte töötajate ja rohkem isejuhtivate organisatsioonide kontekstis.

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Causes and consequences of follower dependency in European corporate companies

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