

Prototypical Jesus? A Discussion of Followership Development from John 6

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As Jesus hung on the cross, He died uttering the words, “It is finished” (John 19:30). From a certain perspective, this statement can be easily challenged. Finished? Really? As a leader, Jesus died betrayed and abandoned by His closest followers, dreams of greatness in ruin with no strategic plan in place for what was to follow. Yet, He says the work He has been sent to do by His Father is complete. After His resurrection, His followers return to Him as a squabbling set of teenagers with no real clue of what is unfolding. Forty days of personal investment and coaching to address their doubts and questions do not seem to help either. Full of youthful zeal, they still expect Jesus to restore Israel and take the throne (Acts 1:6). Yet, to these naïve protégés, Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom. He departs, the Holy Spirit comes, and the disciples are transmuted to Apostles – then deployed into work that shook the very foundations of the Roman Empire with a whole new paradigm of organization.

What made these followers of Jesus return after running for their own lives and denying that they even knew Him? What made them committed to His cause to found one of the major world religions? Why were they so good at establishing the kingdom of God and why did they suit the role so well? This paper uses the account of John 6 where Jesus offends his followers and refines his core team, in comparison to contemporary organizational and psychological theory concerning leader and follower style alignment, person-organizational fit (PO-fit), and person-job fit (PJ-fit), to draw out principles for human resource management and leadership development.

Jesus was an inflammatory leader to follow. After feeding five thousand men, their women and children, the people began to sense the opportunity for Jewish political ascent, wanting to make Jesus their King (John 6:14). Jesus *walks* over the Tiberias Sea to join His disciples where later the people find him at the synagogue in Capernaum, desperate not for words of life but for further signs to confirm their material aspirations. The scene is set for a conversation that shocks and excludes, then identifies and selects the true followers of Jesus and His ways. Jesus speaks with culturally and religiously offensive metaphors that are increasingly scandalous when taken literally (Crossan, 1972). First, He claims to “have come down from heaven” which produces grumbling among the crowd. His references to manna are culturally understood, but the people could not connect the son of Joseph as divinely originated despite the performance of His miracles. Second, He rebukes them for their response stating further “this bread is my flesh” driving His agenda to affront the core values of his audience. In the final discourse, Jesus takes a further step stunning the crowd by commanding them to eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:32-59), refuting a commandment from Levitical law forbidding the consumption of meat with lifeblood still in it (Genesis 9:4). To the minds of His hearers, Jesus just recused Himself from political office. In response they state, “this is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” and droves of Jesus’ followers depart dejected and disappointed (John 6: 60-66).

In terms of sifting out committed followers, this was an effective strategy. Those left standing before Jesus do so because there is revelation of who He is, even if their expectation remains that He will assume physical control of Israel a different way. As a leader, Jesus understands His followers. There is good reason to assume most of His core team were teenagers. Under Jewish cultural norms, it was expected for a man to marry at 18 years of age (Bonikowsky, 2008). Only Peter is recorded in scripture to have had a wife (Matthew 8:14-15). Equally, Jesus and Peter appeared to be the only two among their party to pay the temple tax – a requirement of men above the age of 20 (Exodus 30:14-15). Given that many of the disciples were called from vocational enterprises (John 1:35-45), it also seems reasonable to assume they had not progressed in the rabbinical schools beyond the

Bar Mitzvah rite of passage. Essentially, for the majority¹, they were scholarly dropouts, unable to continue with further study, and left with no other choice than to take up work in their family businesses. They were recruited outside of the academies and institutions where the smartest students could be found. At the moment, Peter declares, “Lord, to whom shall we go...We have come to believe [*pisteuō*] and know [*ginōskō*] that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6: 68-69). About 18 months has passed since they were called from these circumstances to service with Jesus. In this short time, Jesus has transformed their values to the point where they see through His words to the heart of the message, unfettered by formal education or theoretical constructs of rabbinical theology. They have been transformed in their *pisteuō*, or cognitive understanding of who Jesus is, and their *ginōskō*, or core belief of who Jesus is and what He represents (Blue Letter Bible Institute, 2011).

Briefly reviewing this short account highlights the importance of what Jesus achieved through this process and serves to identify principles regarding the relationship between leaders and followers, and how leaders can select and deploy their workers into active service. In modern psychological and human resource theory, these concepts of person-organization fit and person-job fit have been developed into constructs to explain how followers are adequately positioned and tooled for executing their responsibilities (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). PO-fit describes, “the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work”(Kristof, 1996, p. 1) while PJ-fit points to, “the development of each [person in their] state of maximum efficiency, so that [they] may be able to do...the highest grade of work for which his natural abilities fit him” (Taylor, 1913, p. 9).

The antecedents of PO-fit theory are rooted in the work of Schneider’s (1987) reversal of Lewin’s (1975) formula that human behavior is a function of a person and their environment, or $B = f(P, E)$ to contend that environments, or organizations are rather shaped by individuals and their behavior within them. Using a three-step model of Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA), Schneider theorizes that PO-fit is far from random because individuals are attracted to an organization’s “goals, structures or processes,” self-select

¹ Matthew would be the probable exception in this case.

into that particular environment, or reject it to simply leave (p. 443). Those foundational components of goal, structure and process are the deposits of the organization's founder and their influence. PO-fit is theoretically developed in the literature to stem from four possible antecedents, the most commonly cited relationship being identified between the values of the organization and the individual (Sekiguchi, 2004), where values step from cognitive assent and belief.

Returning to the events by Lake Galilee, it is clear that Jesus fully appreciates the worldview of the crowds who followed Him. He knew their intent and among them had a band of more committed followers who similarly remained sympathetic to the overall desire for Israel's restoration. It is safe to assume here that the disciples, when first called, were not much different in their cultural outlook to the general population covered by this account. However, in following Jesus, their values-set and belief systems were realigned. Jesus was not a prototypical leader reflecting his follower's identities or aspirations (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). Rather, He used culturally loaded and religiously sanctified concepts to explicitly shock, provoke discord, and force choice (selection/rejection) as presented in Schneider's (1987) ASA model. As a founding leader, Jesus sets the structure, forms the goals, and dictates the processes by what "follow me" entails (John 10:27). At the end of the account, the disciples opt-in, self-selecting the form of organization Jesus seeks to establish, based on their initial attraction and the change in their values, understanding, and beliefs.

A second review of this account using PJ-fit theory also points to the predictive capacity of followers to be exemplary in their execution of their responsibility when aligned to leaders' values sets (Kelley, 1992). Despite empirical studies demonstrating the discriminant validity of the PO-fit and PJ-fit constructs, research has also been conducted demonstrating interactive relationship between PO-fit and PJ-fit variables (Sekiguchi, 2004). Jesus used directive and counter-cultural tactics in training and selecting his followers. Therefore, when the disciples came to fully understand the ways of Jesus' kingdom, they were already separated from their common social aspirations, enabling them to fully engage a different form of organization. This would seem to reflect the interactive relationship between the two

constructs. Because of their organizational training process, they had nothing to lose, nowhere else to go, were stripped of their cultural assumptions, and ready for their deployment (John 6:68). Pointing back to Taylor's PJ-fit theory of fulfilling human capacity and potential, the journey for the Apostles appears complete as the High Priest and rulers note, "the courage of Peter and John [realizing] that they were unschooled men [then] they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Again, where PJ-fit is framed in terms of the individuals' desires being met in the tasks of the organization, the Apostles having realigned desires and values (Sekiguchi, 2004) through the discipleship process, are perfectly suited to their vocation and consequently effective in their execution of their responsibility.

Ultimately, Jesus, as leader, sets a clear direction in John 6 for His followers to engage. He is not a prototypical leader seeking to embody or identify with His followers. He is counter cultural and offensive, and consequently, many leave. Through this training process, His remaining followers experience a further round of realignment in their worldview and belief systems. Jesus had selected His disciples from obscurity for this purpose, trained them in kingdom organizational processes and structures, fitting His followers to the organizational environment he was about creating. Secondly, and because of this process, He was able to deploy the Apostles to effective service because they ultimately desired nothing more than building this new form of organization. They personally owned the organizational outcomes of Jesus' kingdom and, as developed leaders, were ready to execute them as their own (Adair, 2008). Drawing these leadership and organizational principles from this account demonstrates the ingenuity of Jesus' human resource management in developing great leaders able to affect significant change and ultimately recast the course of human history.

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