



The qualities of a “leader” and a “follower”

Total time: About 40 minutes

Format: Individual, then pairs, then whole class

Group size: Any

Materials: Something to write on.

Objective

To help students reflect on their own and others' conscious and subconscious views of leaders and followers, and to consider how those views shape the way they see the world.

Instructions

- 1) Ask each student to write two columns. In the first, they are to write every word that comes to mind when they think of “a leader.” In the second, every word for “a follower.” Quickly, no editing.
(5 min)
- 2) In pairs, ask the students to compare lists. Have them discuss the following questions:
 - a) Why did you choose the words you did?
 - b) Is any of the columns more positive or negative than the other?(10 min)
- 3) With the whole class, tally the most common words for each column. Together, analyse the words chosen. What do you find? Are there any obvious differences between the two columns? If so, in what way? (10 min)
- 4) Discussion and reflection:
 - a) Where do our associations about leaders and followers come from? Think broadly (school, films, family, work, etc).
 - b) Can you think of someone you consider a follower and who you deeply respect? Do they fit our shared list of follower traits?
 - c) Are there leaders you don't respect and if so, do they fit our list of leader traits?
 - d) Is it possible to sort people into “leader types” and “follower types”? Are people born leaders or followers?
 - e) If a person believes they are “just a follower,” how might that impact what they say and do?(15 min)

Facilitators note: It is worth separating two things. How we value leading and following is shaped by culture – which is why the stereotypes shift across time and place. But the human tendency to follow is not a cultural invention; it runs deep in how people have always worked together. Let students reach the discomfort of the stereotype on their own; don't resolve it for them.