



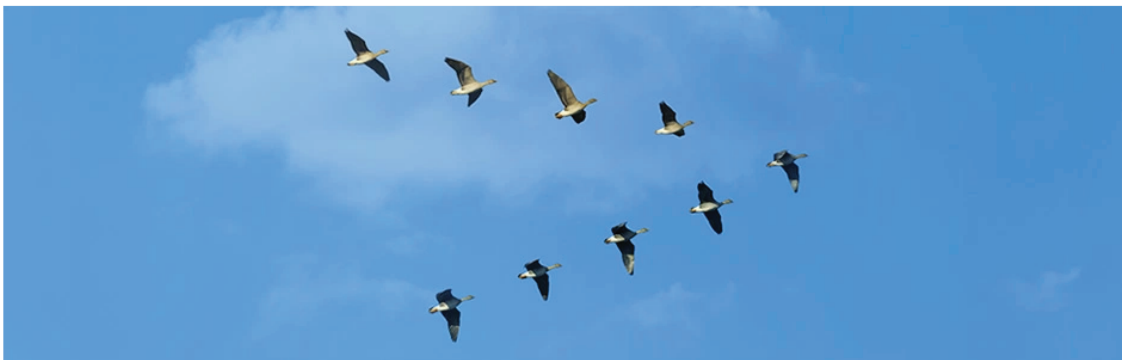
## COMMUNITY

# Science and the Leader-Follower Relationship

*Jim spun around and stared at the back of his cube. Anyone who saw his clenched jaw and flushed face would know he was angry. But there was no one there to see him. It was after 10 PM and Jim was alone on the floor. He turned back to the computer and read the [...]*

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By [Dr. Sherri Malouf](#), President at Situation Management Systems, Inc.



Jim spun around and stared at the back of his cube. Anyone who saw his clenched jaw and flushed face would know he was angry. But there was no one there to see him. It was after 10 PM and Jim was alone on the floor.

He turned back to the computer and read the email again. It was from his boss, MISTER Corbin. "Still not good enough. Fix this before I come in at eight. I will not be embarrassed because some smart-aleck MBA cannot prepare a simple presentation!"

Jim took a deep breath. He'd lost track of the number of times he'd re-worked this slide deck and presentation notes. His boss did not like any of them. He never said what he didn't like or what he wanted to see; it was just "do it again!"

And that, Jim thought, was the last three months in a nutshell. There were hundreds of "gotcha" moments. There were all the comments about "smart-aleck MBAs" and reminders that Mr. Corbin was the boss, and Jim was a rookie. Jim remembered overhearing his boss share one of Jim's ideas, and claim it as his own.

"Well," he thought, "whatever I do won't be good enough, so I might as well tweak this puppy a bit and go home to bed." He made a few changes to the presentation. He decided not to send it right away or Mr. Corbin would think he hadn't worked very hard. So, he set up the email to send in two hours.

"That's it," he thought, "it's time to start looking for a new job. He decided to do that from his computer at home. It would be just like Mr. Corbin to monitor his browser use. The last thing he did before he headed home was flip the bird at Mr. Corbin's empty office.

How can we make sense of this? Some would analyze Mr. Corbin psychologically diagnosing him with a personality disorder, or behaviorally, advocating that he needs a coach ASAP. Some would suggest that Jim could do a better job of influencing Mr. Corbin which could make the situation better. In many cases people would analyze this situation focusing on either the leader or the follower.

My research turned the lens away from either the leader or the follower and focused on the relationship between them. Organizations depend on healthy relationships to operate effectively and productively, particularly the relationship between those that lead and those that follow. But how do you forge such relationships?

The Implicit Social Elements® are **trust, fairness, self-control, empathy, status, mutual recognition respect, and reciprocity**. These elements affect every relationship.

Science and the Leader-Follower Relationship is based on my in-depth studies of the leader-follower relationship, and my intent in writing it was to answer the question about how we forge such relationships. Understanding this relationship is like working on a puzzle with a constantly shifting picture. Leaders and followers connect in many ways: psychologically, biologically, socially, organizationally, culturally, and environmentally. In other words, there are a lot of different disciplines that can be used to analyze this relationship.

Let's consider what a healthy and productive relationship looks like. Let's imagine Jim's situation with a very different boss.

Jim looked at the clock. It was almost eight. He was sure they were getting close. Jim completed the last round of changes, then he texted Art, his boss, to let him know the changes were done. A minute or two later, Art's text came back, "Let's go to video."

Jim looked at their shared screen "What do you think?" he asked Art. "Are we there yet?"

"Just about. Do we have a graphic we can use to illustrate slide 6?"

"No, but I can create one from the numbers."

"Do it. And I think that will put a bow on it. Text me when you are done." Art signed off.

It took Jim an hour to get the graphic just right. Then he showed it to Art.

"Looks good to me," Art said. "Can you think of anything else we can do to make it better?"

"Nope. I think it's good."

"I think so, too. Go home and get some sleep and I'll see you in the morning." Art paused. "If you have one of your brainstorm moments about something else we could do, just make the change. But please be sure to tell me about it."

"Sure thing."

Jim packed up his things and headed for the exit. Before he left, he turned and faced Art's office. He smiled and saluted. Then he went home.

While Jim, Mr. Corbin and Art are not flesh-and-blood people, the situations in this book could be real and you may recognize similar situations from your own experiences. These situations are narrated in this book to demonstrate and probe the elements of healthy relationships.

Many elements of a healthy relationship are not explicit. They cannot be verbalized as straightforward intentions or actions. Much of what we experience when we engage with others is unspoken or “implicit.” The implicit, while internal, can be read externally and therefore can impact the quality of our relationships. How can we identify and explain these implicit behaviors in ourselves and others? How do they affect our relationships? How can we master the implicit signals that we send and receive to help us create more productive relationships?

At this point, I would like to introduce The Implicit Social Elements®, which are the key conclusion of my research into the building blocks of healthy leader-follower relationships. The Implicit Social Elements® are **trust, fairness, self-control, empathy, status, mutual recognition respect, and reciprocity**. These elements affect every relationship. [Science and the Leader-Follower Relationship](#) will walk through the science and my research defining The Implicit Social Elements® and then, followed by examples of their use for improving and maintaining relationships.

Sometimes the application of the Implicit Social Elements® will seem like common sense. For example, I am sure you would agree that higher levels of trust would lead to higher quality relationships. However, that is only touching the surface, and we need to dive deeper and ask more difficult questions, such as What role does systems thinking play? What is implicit knowledge? How does the brain impact relationships? How do you define close relationships? How can we use The Implicit Social Elements® to improve our relationships?

We will look at all this and more, and you will learn how to create thriving relationships using the Implicit Social Elements®.

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Sherri Malouf, PhD is the President of Situation Management Systems, Inc., a leadership training consultancy that is focused on helping people be authentic and successful when working with others. She holds a PhD in Human Development from Fielding Graduate University and a MPhil in Management Research from the University of Bath (UK). *Science and the Leader-Follower Relationship* is based on her research thesis and decades studying the relationship between leaders and followers. In addition, she has worked for over 30 years globally in topics such as influence, negotiation, and conflict management.