

Aybike (Mutluer) Mergen
Curriculum Vitae

Present Position

PhD Candidate
Graduate School of Business
Koc University (www.ku.edu.tr)
e-mail: amutluer@ku.edu.tr

Visiting Scholar
Schulich School of Business
York University (www.yorku.ca)
e-mail: amergen@yorku.ca

Research interests: followership, emergence and effectiveness of leadership, ethical decision making, cross-cultural studies, change management, and formal modelling.

Teaching interests: leadership theory and practice, ethics in business, research methods, organizational behavior.

Education

PhD. in Management and Strategy

Feb 2015 – Ongoing

Koc University, Istanbul, Turkey | Full Scholarship

Thesis: *The Participatory Theatre Framework (PTF) of Leadership*

Doctoral thesis defense scheduled for Summer 2022

Subjects studied include behavioral decision making, research methods, econometrics, and management in cross-cultural context.

M.A. in Political Science

Sep 2011 – July 2013

Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey | Full Scholarship

Thesis: *Leader Survivability in Non-Democracies: The Role of Blame-Shifting*

Subjects studied include analysis and research design, quantitative research methods, formal modeling and policy analysis, comparative politics, and political theory.

M.Sc. in Economics

Sep 2010 – July 2011

Tilburg University, Tilburg, Netherlands | Partial Scholarship

Thesis: *Campaign Promises and Adoption of Policies*

Subjects studied include game theory and industrial organization, competitiveness and competition policy, labor and public economics.

B.A. in Economics

Sep 2006 – June 2010

Koc University, Istanbul, Turkey | Full Scholarship

Vehbi Koç Scholar Award, completed two Honors Projects in Economics

Subjects studied include differential equations, advanced calculus, econometrics, game theory, economics of information and contracts (advanced game theory), statistics, and economic history.

Highschool

Sep 2002 – June 2006

Kadıkoy Anatolian Highschool, Istanbul, Turkey

Graduated ranked first in TM, placed 118th in OSS

Certificates

Change Management – PROSCI

June 2015

Psychology of change, theory and perspectives, change management process, organizational change competency, project management, ADKAR®

Publications

Understanding the followers of toxic leaders: Toxic illuio and personal uncertainty

Mergen, A., & Ozbilgin, M. (2021). Understanding the followers of toxic leaders: Toxic illuio and personal uncertainty. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 23(1), 45-63.

Toxic leaders are one of the main threats to the wellbeing of people in the workplace and in society in general, and followers play a critical role in constructing and maintaining toxic leaders. In this narrative review, we draw on Bourdieu's concept of illuio and incorporate it with the social and cognitive psychology approaches in an attempt to frame the dynamic system that sustains toxic leadership through continued support of the followers. More specifically, as we introduce the illuio perspective in a process-relational context to the toxic leadership discussion, we (i) address the allure of toxic leaders as an incentive for followers to join the toxic illuio as a way to cope with their high personal uncertainty, (ii) illustrate the mechanisms and processes that motivate followers of toxic leaders to remain in the toxic illuio once they join. In this context, we also briefly discuss and differentiate between the ethical and moral dimensions of toxic leadership.

Audience roles: An inclusive typology of leadership constituency

Mergen, A., Bell, C., & Aycan, Z. (under review at *Leadership Quarterly*). Audience roles: An inclusive typology of leadership constituency.

Conventional leadership models tend to be leader-centric with typologies of group members based on differences in the value that followers bring to the leader. Typically, these typologies provide distinctions between supportive followers whereas non-followers are represented relatively monolithically as obstacles or irritants to be overcome, subdued, or expelled. We propose a participatory theater (PT) approach that considers group members' attitudinal and behavioral alignment with the leader to a) inclusively recognize all group members as contributors to the leadership phenomenon; b) provide a typology of roles that includes followers, non-followers, and those in between (i.e., devoted followers, vigilant followers, covert followers, pragmatists, survivors, dissenters, rebels, and apathetics); and c) understand leadership as the emergent product of interactions of role inhabitants with each other and the leader. In this paper, we first review extant literature on leadership and followership with special attention to roles, identifying contributions and gaps our PT approach can fill. We then introduce our PT audience role typology, review the theoretical underpinnings, and describe each role. Lastly, we discuss applications of the PT approach to empirical research in relevant domains of leadership, justice, strategic human resource management, and change management.

Toxic illusio in the global value chain: The case of Amazon

Mergen, A., & Ozbilgin, M. (in press). Toxic illusio in the global value chain: The case of Amazon.

In S. Metin Camgoz & O. Tayfur Ekmekci (Eds.) *Destructive Leadership and Management Hypocrisy: Advances in Theory and Practice*. Emerald Publishing.

Toxic leadership is often studied from a leader centric perspective, which focuses on the detrimental outcomes of leaders with destructive ideas and practices. In this chapter, we provide a global value chain perspective, which accounts for effects of corporate leadership from inception of a product or service idea to its consumption across the value chain. In particular, we demonstrate how toxic leadership is sustained through an illusio, i.e., the allure of the often charismatic leadership discourse, which is rendered unaccountable due to lack of global regulation of GVCs. This allows for global organisations and loxic leaders to exploit weaknesses in national level regulation. Drawing on a netnographic study of toxic leadership in Amazon, we demonstrate how toxic leadership created the illusion of success while perpetuating toxicity and exploitation across their complex value chains internationally.

Ongoing Research

Audience role typology: Empirical evidence

Mergen, A., Bell, C., & Aycan, Z. (in progress). Audience role typology: Empirical evidence

In this paper, we present evidence for the existance of the audience role typology from two separate studies. First, we conducted a mixed-methods exploratory study with undergraduate students at the Schulich School of Business in which we used open-ended response format and asked participants to describe the roles that individuals can adopt in a generic leadership setting. These descriptions were then coded by two independent coders for underlying role attributes. Secondly, we developed a tool to assess an individual's audience role based on their level of attitudinal and behavioural alignment with the leader. We conducted a confirmatory survey study on 300 US citizen adults in the context of the Trump presidency. The results of the latent class analysis of both the coded qualitative data and the assessment tool data strongly supports the proposed theoretical framework and the existence of an audience typology.

Dynamics of audience role change: A case in political context

Mergen, A. and Bell, C. (in progress). Dynamics of audience role change: A case in political context

Although the audience roles are generally stable through time, individuals can and will revise their roles if their attitudinal alignment with the leader or the behavioral patterns of their adopted roles change significantly. In this paper, we explore the process of audience role change in the context of political turmoil of 2020 Presidential elections through a two-wave survey data from 800 American voters. More specifically, we asked the same participants to complete the audience role assessment tool and other relevant scales (e.g., anomie, system justification) twice, once after the elcetion night and once before the inauguration day, to understand how the political climate of uncertainty and polarization affected individuals' audience role change. Currently, we are in the process of analyzing the data but the initial results suggest dominant paths of audience role transitivity as well as possible social-cognitive psychological mechanims that lead to or inhibit change.

Audience roles across cultures

Mergen, A. and Bell, C. (in progress). Audience roles across cultures

In this paper, we compare and contrast the audience roles' attitudinal alignment levels and behavioral patterns across North American and Chinese business contexts. More specifically, we explore how employees from different cultures who adopted the same audience roles in their respective organizations perceive their role and how they vary across key organizational variables such as organizational commitment, voice, and job satisfaction. In collaboration with scholars from Hunan Normal University (HNU) in China, we completed the translation and the pilot run of the audience role assessment tool. We are currently in the process of main data collection.

Audience topology: Mapping the leadership constituency

Mergen, A., Bell, C., & Aycan, Z. (in progress). Audience topology: Mapping the leadership constituency

In my thesis, I conceptualize audience topology as the sub-group level social network structures such as leader-favoring majority, divided audience, neutral audience, and leader-favoring minority. More specifically, individuals in audience roles compile into role groups which in turn create clusters that form the audience topology. As such, the audience topology as the map of the leadership constituency represents the collective agency of the group. In this paper, we first introduce the construct of audience topology and its types. Secondly, we discuss how audience topology can influence and inform leadership and its outcomes based on the game theory's median-voter approach to electoral models and voter behavior. Understanding the topology of an audience have significant implications for implementing policies, leader emergence and effectiveness, and change management.

Teaching Experience

Instructor, Koc University

Summer 2021

MGMT 450 – Next Generation Leadership

Developed the course and taught a class of senior undergraduates virtually. The course aimed to provide students with an insight into the leadership literature with a particular emphasis on the recent developments in the field. It is designed to introduce the main approaches to leadership in the context of how they inform current best practices. Through case-studies, group exercises, simulations and application of leadership assessment tools, the course helps students to ground and utilize leadership theories in real world.

Teaching Assistant

Sep 2011 – Jun 2013

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabanci University

Junior level undergraduate Research Methods courses on statistics, Fall 2012 & Spring 2013

Hold weekly problem-solving sessions with mandatory attendance.

Humanity and Society I&II, Fall 2011 & Spring 2012

Hold weekly 90 mins discussion sessions that follow a 45 mins conference by the course instructor on the week's topic. Responsible for course planning, quizzes and homework for the session students.

Tutoring

Feb 2015 – Ongoing

Helping struggling undergraduate students in a wide range of courses such as statistics, microeconomics, macroeconomics, and math.

Work Experience

Visiting Scholar

Sep 2017 - Ongoing

Schulich School of Business, York University

Collaborating with Prof. Chris Bell on Participatory Theatre Framework related research projects involving theory building, survey development and validity checks, data collection, and qualitative & quantitative analysis of the collected data.

Research Assistant

Feb 2015 - Ongoing

Graduate School of Business, Koc University

Senior member of the KU Leadership Lab. Collaborating with Prof. Zeynep Aycan on a number of research projects ranging from large scale field data collection to experiment design. Mentoring junior members of the lab.

Consultant

Aug 2014 – Jan 2015

Deloitte, Consulting – Finance Transformation

Conducted an organizational transformation project for one of the oldest and biggest industrial holding groups of Turkey.

Analyst

June 2013 – Aug 2014

EY (Ernst&Young), Advisory – Performance Improvement

Conducted an organizational transformation project, designed as is and to be processes, target operating models (TOMs) and organizational charts for each department, and produced process KPIs, RACI analysis and role descriptions for a leading construction company. Took an active part in a project for developing a strategic road map for Turquality certification by analyzing the as-is condition and determining the necessary projects for a leading confectionery company. Involved in both research and the quantitative analysis processes of a report on the new regulations on Turkish banking sector and their effects on Turkish economic performance in the mid/long-run.

Invited Talks

Mergen, A., & Ozbilgin, M. (February, 2021) Understanding the followers of toxic leaders: Toxic illusio and personal uncertainty. CISEI Centre at University of Southampton, UK.

Mergen, A. (September, 2019) A participatory theatre approach to leadership. Schulich School of Business, York University, Canada.

Theses

The Participatory Theatre Framework of Leadership

PhD in Management, Koç University, Ongoing

Advisor: Zeynep Aycan

My doctoral thesis, entitled “The Participatory Theatre Framework (PTF) of Leadership”, challenges the dominant leader-centric conceptualization of followers and the social group in leadership contexts. My thesis has produced two theory papers, one is in print at International Journal of Management Reviews and the other currently under review at the Leadership Quarterly, as well as an empirical paper in preparation to be submitted for journal publication in Summer 2021. In the main

theoretical section of my thesis, I propose a new participatory theatre framework (PTF) of leadership in which leadership is a dynamic phenomenon that emerges out of the interactions of leader(s), followers, and non-followers who are all simultaneously actors and an ‘audience’ to leadership. Within the working analogy of a participatory theatre, my framework aims at (i) highlighting the existence of an ‘audience’ that expands beyond followers, (ii) proposing a ‘typology’ of roles in the audience (i.e., devoted followers, vigilant followers, pragmatists, rebels, activists, survivors, and apathetics), and (iii) proposing a ‘topology’ of audience members (i.e., social network structures such as leader-favoring majority, divided audience, neutral audience, and leader-favoring minority) influencing the leadership outcomes. In the PTF, leadership is the compilation of individual and collective agencies and the framework itself functions as a multi-level flowchart that operates simultaneously at and across individual (role), sub-group (role group), and group (audience) levels. The second section of my thesis demonstrates that audience members are co-creators of the leadership phenomena through the agency of devoted followers in the context of toxic leadership (published as ‘Understanding the followers of toxic leaders: Toxic illu^sio and personal uncertainty’). The final section of my thesis presents the empirical evidence for the existence of the audience role typology (preparing for publication as ‘Audience role typology: Empirical evidence’).

Leader Survivability in Non-Democracies: The Role of Blame-Shifting

MA in Political Science, Sabanci University, 2013

Advisor: Ozge Kemahlioglu

Paper utilizes formal modelling to analyze autocratic leaders’ incentives for holding elections as an insurance policy for times of crisis as a blame shifting instrument. It also discusses 4 countries as case studies from Arab Spring.

Campaign Promises and Adoption of Policies

MSc in Economics, Tilburg University, 2011

Advisor: Florian Schuett

Paper utilizes formal modelling to analyze how an electorate with a normal distribution over the policy spectrum would behave when faced with heterogeneous candidates regarding their possibility of lying about their policy bliss points. It also evolves the base model by introducing a possibility of a scandal, in the sense that a lying candidate being exposed.

Personal Information

Date of birth: January 5, 1988

Citizenship: Turkish citizen & Canadian citizen

Software: Python, R, LaTeX, MySQL, MPlus, MS Project, MS Visio

Interests: Woodworking and FRP

References

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