In this research, we adopt a follower-centered leadership approach, which aims at integrating both implicit leadership theories (ILTs) and implicit followership theories (IFTs). While ILTs investigate followers’ subjective views of leaders; IFTs focus on the views of followers (e.g., Sy, 2010). We are interested in the joint influence of ILT and IFT fit on the leader–follower dyad. We further aim to explore the fit between the followers’ and leaders’ view on ideal leadership and followership respectively. We also compare the fit between actual leaders and followers from a follower’s perspective and potential consequences on the effectiveness of the leader–follower dyadic relationship.

**Context**

Since contextual factors significantly shape ILT and IFT, but have mainly been ignored in both leadership and followership theory (Junker and van Dick, 2014), this research explores the impact of an organisational context, that has received less research attention, namely religious organisations, more specifically the Church of England (CoE) (Allen, 2013). Over the past decades, there has been a growing recognition in management research in the study of faith-driven organisations and a call to explore the operations of religious institutions (Ariza-Montes et al. 2017; Zigan and Le Grysk, 2016). Yet, limited research in organisation studies has examined leadership in churches despite their ubiquitous influence on social, economic and political developments (Grandy, 2013). Leaders in religious organisations need develop an understanding of the differences in perception about ideal leaders and followers which consequently result in more effective leadership.

**Methodology**

Given that researchers in leadership and followership have extensively called for inductive approaches in order to be able to acknowledge for contextual factors (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), and the nature of our research question, we have adopted a qualitative approach. In total, 31 semi-structured interviews with members of CoE
were conducted. Since Dinh et al. (2014) argue that the nature of leadership processes varies with each level (i.e. individual, group and organisational level), in this research we conducted interviews with parish priests (leaders), task leaders (being leaders and followers) and congregation members (followers) across seven different parishes in the CoE. Interview questions mainly focussed on the understanding, perception and expectations on ideal and actual leadership and followership. Data was analysed using a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Findings

The preliminary analysis of the leaders’ 
perception of ideal leadership revealed that in most cases members of the congregation did not have clear expectations on their leaders. Vicars related ideal leadership to attributes such as carrying a vision, encouraging and enabling their followers, strong social skills and being firm in serving God. Some of these characteristics were also mentioned by the followers. Less overlap seemed to occur in the level of team work and shared leadership which was strongly expected by task leaders but less so by vicars.

Our analysis of leaders and followers’ 
perception on ideal followership revealed that the religious context mattered as many followers also described their primary followership to Jesus next to the vicar. The analysis of the followers’ perception on effective followership revealed that the task leaders felt that their role was to support the vicar but also to share leadership with him. Several task leaders described that the vicar would be the spiritual leader and they would be the organisational leaders. Hierarchically, several task leaders expressed “I am not below him”.

When investigating the followers’ and leaders’ perception regarding the fit of the vicar to the congregation, interestingly, some vicars felt that they were not necessarily a good fit to the congregation. One vicar described how the quality of fit had changed over time. Apparently, the leader had gone through a period of excitement, adjustment, fit and exhaustion. Interestingly, some members of the congregation felt that there would be a misfit with the vicar in terms of intellectual capacity. Some congregation members felt that the vicar did as expected (to achieve fit) but actually had other ambitions and visions (which is probably why vicars leave after some years).
Although it has been argued that the fit or misfit might explain the level of consensus in followers' and leaders' ratings of the same leader–follower relationship (Junker and van Dick, 2014), our findings indicate that the level of fit does not necessarily impact the level of consensus due to the commitment of followers and leaders to follow God. Our findings further uncover the interesting phenomenon that it is the internalised Christian belief and value system of the followers which promoted greater level of commitment and involvement irrespective of the leadership match. The role of Christian faith instills a moderating effect that attenuates the effect of misalignment.

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