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An Investigation of Leader-Member Exchange, Organizational Justice and Performance

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TITLE

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ABSTRACT

Recently, the concept of organizational justice has been employed to re-examine the Leader-member exchange (LMX) literature. LMX, and three forms of justice (distributive, procedural and interactional) examined using a sample of $N = 275$ leader-member dyads. Results indicated procedural justice moderates the relationship between LMX and performance.

(47 words)

PRESS PARAGRAPH

Employee perceptions of fair treatment by organizations and supervisors may be related to their job performance. In this research, relationships between perceptions of the quality of the relationship with the supervisor (termed, Leader-member exchange or LMX) and employee perceptions of fairness were investigated. Results indicated that the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship combines with perceptions of the fairness of the formal procedures employed to predict performance. Moreover, employee perceptions of the use of formal procedures by supervisors in high quality relationships may react negatively with lower performance. Implications for building more effective working relationships are discussed.

(96 words)

Employee perceptions of organizational justice are a necessary condition for leadership in complex organizations (Scandura, 1999). Meindl (1989) pointed out the importance of fairness issues to the values, motives and leadership styles of managers. The purpose of this paper is to develop a framework for the study of leadership that is built upon the assumption that Leader-member exchange (LMX) and fairness both contribute to effective performance. Using Meindl's (1989) research as a point of departure, this paper builds a framework for the study of leadership fairness by (a) reviewing concepts from the LMX and organizational justice literature, and (b) empirically examining LMX linkages with organizational justice variables (distributive, interactional and procedural justice) from both superior and subordinate points of view ($N = 275$ dyads). This paper also incorporates rated performance to further examine current controversy in the LMX literature regarding the relationship between LMX and performance. Only a few LMX studies have incorporated justice variables, and there is a need to examine justice as a moderator of the LMX – performance relationship.

Leader-Member Exchange

The role development process in leadership has been researched for over 25 years, beginning with the classic “vertical dyad linkage” studies by Dansereau, Graen & Haga (1975) and Graen & Cashman (1975). LMX is defined as the quality of the relationship between a superior and a subordinate and has been related to a number of important outcomes including job satisfaction, productivity, turnover (negatively) and the career progress of managers (cf., Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). A meta-analysis by Gerstner & Day (1997) reveals that some studies do not find significant relationships between LMX and outcomes. For example, Vecchio & Gobdel (1984) did not find a relationship between LMX and turnover but Ferris (1985) did. These inconsistent findings suggest that the search for relevant moderator variables is an important direction for future research. For

example, Graen, Scandura and Graen (1986) found that the relationship between LMX was moderated by the growth needs of employees. Another possible moderator might be the employees' perceptions of fair treatment by the supervisor (Manogran, Stauffer & Conlon, 1994). Yet, fairness issues are just emerging in the literature on LMX (Scandura, 1999).

Organizational Justice and LMX

There is a great deal of theory and research on organizational justice (Greenberg, 1990), that has clearly demonstrated the importance of fairness to organizational effectiveness. Also issues of fairness and their relationship to the evaluation of supervisory behavior have been explored in the organizational justice literature (Tyler, 1986). Although the examination of justice in the leadership literature is just emerging (Scandura, 1999), it is clear that some LMX studies have justice implications. For example, a study by Duarte, Goodson and Klich (1993) reported that LMX may bias perceptions of performance (supervisors did not attend to objective performance measures, but rather to the quality of the relationship). These findings raise the issue of the fairness of the LMX differentiation process. If supervisors are not using objective performance indicators, those with lower quality LMX may view the performance evaluation as unfair. Liden, Wayne and Stillwell (1993) found that affect (specifically, liking) is a predictor of LMX development, yet some employees may view affect (in the absence of performance) as an unfair advantage. Also, a study by Cleyman, Jex and Love (1993) related lower LMX to the filing of employee grievances, suggesting that the quality of the work relationship may be related to perceptions of unfair organizational practices.

Ensuring distributive justice in the work group has been defined as a key operating task for managers (Graen & Scandura, 1986). Manogran, Stauffer and Conlon (1994) found that LMX was significantly and positively related to employee perceptions of distributive, interactional and procedural justice. We will reexamine these findings of

the Manogran et al. study by examining the relationships between three forms of organizational justice and LMX. However, the Manogran et al. study did not employ supervisor perceptions of LMX (labeled SLMX). The present study will include both supervisor and subordinate perceptions of LMX. Thus, the three components of organizational justice and their relationship to LMX will be examined from both supervisor and subordinate points of view, and we hypothesize that:

H1: *Distributive, procedural and interactional justice will be significantly and positively related to LMX (subordinate ratings) and SLMX (supervisor ratings).*

The Manogran et al. study also did not include supervisor ratings of performance nor were moderating effects explored. In the following sections, we consider the moderating effects of organizational justice on the relationship between LMX and performance.

The Moderating Effects of Organizational Justice

Distributive Justice

Distributive Justice (or equity) is defined as employee perceptions of the fairness of the outcomes employees receive, such as pay (Adams, 1965). It is expected that LMX is positively and significantly related to employee perceptions of distributive justice. As LMX relationships develop, the subordinate receives valued benefits from the exchange relationship, and should perceive that outcomes received are fair in relation to outputs. Further, in a high quality relationship, re-negotiation may occur if the subordinate perceives that unfairness has occurred. Recent studies of LMX and organizational justice focus on procedural and interactional justice and do not include measures of distributive justice. The present study will address this gap by including distributive justice as a correlate of performance. We expect that distributive justice will moderate the relationship of LMX to performance. The form of this moderator is as follows: Higher LMX and distributive justice will be more related to performance than lower LMX and distributive justice. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2: Employee perceptions of distributive justice will moderate the relationship between LMX and performance.

Procedural Justice

Research has supported the distinctness of distributive and procedural justice, and the relative importance of procedural justice in work settings (Folger & Greenberg, 1985; Greenberg, 1986; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Procedural justice is defined as the application of fair rules in decisions regarding resource allocation. Much research on procedural justice has focused upon performance appraisal (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Taylor, Tracy, Renard, Harrison & Carroll, 1995; Korsgaard & Roberson, 1995) and pay systems (Folger & Konovsky, 1989). However, social exchange (operationalized by LMX) as an antecedent of procedural justice has been only recently investigated (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman & Taylor, 2000, Cropanzano, Prehar & Chen, 2002).

In LMX relationships, how allocation rules are applied is a determinant of the development of trust in working relationships, which is a key element of LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). We expect procedural justice will moderate the relationship between LMX and performance. The form of this moderator is expected to follow the same pattern as that for distributive justice: Higher LMX and procedural justice will be more related to performance than lower LMX and procedural justice. Hence,

H3: Employee perceptions of procedural justice will moderate the relationship between LMX and performance.

Interactional Justice

Bies and Moag (1986) proposed that interactional justice is a third aspect of organizational justice, which is defined as the supervisors' application of the rules for communicating fairness to employees. Bies and Moag (1986) proposed that procedures lead to interactions that, in turn lead to outcomes and emphasized the importance of separating the analysis of procedures from the interactions themselves. Thus, LMX and interactional justice should be related to supervisor ratings of performance. A recent

study by Cropanzano, Prehar & Chen (2002) found that LMX mediated the effect of interactional justice on supervisor satisfaction and performance. However, we expect that interactional justice will moderate the relationship of LMX and performance. The form of this interaction is higher LMX and interactional justice will be more related to performance than lower LMX and interactional justice. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4: Employee perceptions of interactional justice will moderate the relationship between LMX and performance.

Method

Sample. Data from a sample of $N = 275$ dyads from a large health care organization in the southeastern United States will be employed to examine links between supervisor and subordinate LMX, organizational justice and performance. The sample was 61.4 percent female, 48.6 percent Caucasian, 24.9 percent African American and 7.5 percent Hispanic, The average age of the subordinates was 43 years and they worked an average of 39 hours per week, with an average job tenure of 6.6 years. The supervisor sample was 52.9 percent female, 68.6 percent Caucasian, 11.8 percent African American and 7.8 percent Hispanic. The average age of supervisors was 48 years and they worked an average of 41 hours per week, with an average job tenure of 10.64 years.

Data were gathered from supervisors during a series of training sessions. Supervisors completed their surveys during the training session and were asked to identify their subordinates. Matched subordinate questionnaires were distributed by facilitators the day after the training session. Subordinates returned their questionnaires to the researchers via mail. Confidentiality across both data collection phases was ensured by the use of numerical identification. The response rate for the subordinate questionnaires was 82%.

Measures. Consistent with prior research on LMX, the 7-item LMX measure (Scandura & Graen, 1984) was administered to 51 supervisors and their direct reports (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) (the Cronbach alpha for LMX was .72

and for the supervisor version, SLMX, the alpha was .84). Also, a job performance assessment, the Employee Rating Scale (ERS) was completed by supervisors for each direct report (Cronbach alpha = .94). Moorman's (1991) measure of distributive, interactional, and procedural justice was employed. Moorman supported the presence of three dimensions of organizational justice with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) procedures. In the present sample, the reliability estimates (coefficient alpha) for the subscales proposed by Moorman (1991) were .88 for distributive justice (5 items), .88 for interactional justice (6 items) and .87 for procedural justice (7 items).

Analysis. Data were analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures to determine the relationships between the justice components, LMX and SLMX. Also, a 2 X 2 factorial ANOVA was employed to examine hypothesized moderating effects of organizational justice on LMX and employee performance. The justice variables and SLMX were dichotomized using median-splits to create two different levels of each variable, low versus high. First, LMX and SLMX were treated as dependent variables with each of the three justice variables (distributive, procedural and interactional justice) as predictors. The unique contribution of the justice variables to the explanation of LMX, SLMX (Omega-squared) was determined, if a significant relationship was found. Next, SLMX and the three justice variables were examined to determine their relationships to rated performance. Moderator effects were examined by the interactions between SLMX and each justice variable to determine if there were joint effects of LMX and justice with respect to employee performance. Finally, a response surface was generated for the interactions space SLMX, Performance and Procedural Justice.

Results

Results of the univariate ANOVA tests for the relationships of the three justice variables, are shown in Tables 1 through 3. As shown in Table 1, subordinate LMX was most significantly related to perceptions of distributive justice; higher levels of LMX

were associated with higher perceptions of distributive justice, or outcome fairness. As shown in Table 2, interactional justice was related to both reports of LMX by leaders and members, as well as to rated performance. The pattern of results was very consistent; higher perceptions of interactional justice were related to higher relationship quality and performance. Table 3 shows the results for procedural justice, and procedural justice was related to higher LMX from both supervisor and subordinates' points of view, but not to performance. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

We tested the moderating effects of the justice variables using the subordinates' ratings of LMX, and no significant interactions were detected. However, using ratings from supervisors of LMX (i.e., SLMX), the results were more encouraging. These results are shown in Tables 4, 5 and 6. As shown in Table 6, there was a significant interaction effect for SLMX and procedural justice predicting performance ($p < .01$). The pattern of means indicates that higher levels of LMX and lower ratings of formal procedures by subordinates are most related to performance (mean = 4.32). High ratings of procedural justice and low SLMX produced lower performance (mean = 3.70), however, than high SLMX and high procedural justice (mean = 4.21). As expected, the lowest performance ratings were for the low LMX and low procedural justice cell (mean = 3.36). Thus, Hypothesis 3 (for procedural justice) was supported.

The form of this significant interaction of LMX, procedural justice and performance (as measured by ERS) is shown in Figure 1. As this figure shows, Procedural Justice, SLMX, and ERS increase at the same pace, until a particular level of Procedural Justice is reached that causes a flattening of ERS for across the higher range of SLMX scores. Because we can calculate the pooled standard error of the combined regression coefficient, we can compare the regression coefficients before and after the

inflection point observed in Figure 1. Before the inflection, where we find low procedural justice, the beta weight between SLMX and Performance is .579; the beta weight after the inflection is .408. The pooled standard error is .074. Therefore, the two regression lines, before and after the inflection, are significantly different from one another ($t(247)=2.31, p<.05$).

This suggests that at this inflection point, procedural justice becomes an important determinant in assessing performance. When procedural justice is high, supervisors in high LMX relationships suppress their reports of performance. On the other hand, when procedural justice is low, the SLMX-performance relationship is higher.

Discussion

Perceptions of justice appear to be related to the quality of Leader-member exchange from both supervisors and subordinate points of view. However, distributive justice (equity concerns) appears to be most related to subordinate LMX perceptions, and not to supervisors. Subordinates may be more sensitive to fairness issues pertaining to the outcomes they receive. Interactional justice was related to both supervisor and subordinate ratings of LMX. Thus, communicating fairness seems to be an important aspect of relationship development. Also, interactional justice was related to performance, which is consistent with previous research (Cropanzano et al., 2002). With respect to procedural justice, the employees' perceptions of the fairness of the formal procedures employed by the organization are related to both LMX and SLMX. However, the SLMX relationship may be more complex, since a significant interaction effect for SLMX and procedural justice in predicting performance was found.

Our results suggest that subordinate perceptions of the fairness of procedural justice may have the most influence on their performance in the lower range of LMX

scores. In the absence of a good relationship with the supervisors, subordinates may thus be more sensitive to the formal procedures that govern their work experience and the outcomes they receive. For high LMX employees, however, higher perceptions of the use of formal procedures by supervisors may result in supervisors' suppressing their ratings of performance. The use of procedural justice by supervisors who view their relationship with subordinates as high quality may, in fact, be detrimental to both the relationship but also to performance of the high LMX subordinate. It is important to note that our ratings of procedural justice were from subordinates and their view of the use of formal procedures was rated independently of the supervisory ratings of the quality of the relationship. Thus, supervisors were likely unaware of how subordinates viewed procedural justice. An important direction for future research, based upon our findings would be to gather ratings of justice perceptions from supervisors to determine the impact of how much in agreement these ratings affect performance.

Our findings suggest that supervisors are perhaps in a better position to evaluate the role that justice plays in the relationship of LMX to performance than subordinates. Supervisors are more knowledgeable about formal procedures of the organization in such areas as performance appraisal. They will likely be more sensitive to how the quality of the relationship may affect performance ratings (Duarte et al., 1995). In the present study subordinates provided ratings of procedural justice, however the LMX ratings by supervisors were more sensitive indicators than subordinate ratings of LMX. Thus, in the context of fairness, supervisor ratings of LMX may be more useful indicators of relationship quality. These findings have important implications for research on LMX and justice, since most studies only employ subordinate ratings of LMX. Future research should thus continue to use both supervisor and subordinate ratings of LMX (Scandura &

Schriesheim, 1994). Also, future research might also include supervisor ratings of the justice variables as there may be differences in the way that supervisors and subordinates perceive fairness issues. This approach is consistent with the theoretical approach of “perspective-taking” that is emerging in LMX theory and research (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

Despite the support we found for procedural justice as a moderator, this study is not without limitations. Data were cross-sectional and care must be taken not to infer causality from these results. To better establish whether LMX is antecedent to, or an outcome of, organizational justice, longitudinal research designs will need to be employed in future research. Also, there might have been some inflation in the relationship between SLMX and performance ratings due to same-source bias. However, we employed ratings of distributive, procedural and interactional justice from subordinates, and therefore, we have some confidence that our findings were not solely due to same-source bias. Also, the detection of interaction effects is less susceptible to the problem of same-source bias, since respondents would probably not be able to discern what variables are being jointly tested.

As noted by prior researchers (Cropanzano et al., 2002; Masterson et al., 2000), more work is needed to examine the ways that organizational justice and social exchange may combine to predict performance. In addition, there are a number of other outcome variables that could be explored, such as absenteeism and turnover. Our results suggest that continued research on the complex relationship between LMX and organizational justice is warranted.

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Table 1

Univariate ANOVA Results: Distributive Justice on SLMX, LMX and Performance

 Dependent Variable: SLMX (Supervisor Report)

Low Distributive Justice	High Distributive Justice	
4.09 (.56)	4.21 (.49)	F(1, 249)= 2.96, p=.09

Dependent Variable: LMX (Subordinate Report)

Low Distributive Justice	High Distributive Justice	
3.17 (.64)	3.62 (.53)	F(1, 263)= 37.80, p< .001, Omega ² =.13

Dependent Variable: ERS (Supervisor Performance Report)

Low Distributive Justice	High Distributive Justice	
3.88 (.82)	4.02 (.76)	F(1, 249)= 1.99, p= .16

N=275

Table 2

Univariate ANOVA Results: Interactional Justice on SLMX, LMX and Performance

Dependent Variable: SLMX (Supervisor Report)		
Low Interactional Justice 4.05 (.58)	High Interactional Justice 4.23 (.48)	F(1, 249)= 6.60, p=.01, Omega ² =.03

Dependent Variable: LMX (Subordinate Report)		
Low Interactional Justice 3.08 (.63)	High Interactional Justice 3.62 (.53)	F(1, 263)= 59.14, p< .001, Omega ² =.19

Dependent Variable: ERS (Supervisor Performance Report)		
Low Interactional Justice 3.78 (.83)	High Interactional Justice 4.08 (.74)	F(1, 249)= 9.28, p= .003, Omega ² =.003

N=275

Table 3

Univariate ANOVA Results: Procedural Justice on SLMX, LMX and Performance

 Dependent Variable: SLMX (Supervisor Report)

Low Procedural Justice	High Procedural Justice	F(1, 251)= 8.35, p=.004, Omega ² =.03
4.04 (.57)	4.23 (.48)	

Dependent Variable: LMX (Subordinate Report)

Low Formal Procedures	High Formal Procedures	F(1, 265)= 32.97, p< .001, Omega ² =.11
3.14 (.65)	3.56 (.57)	

Dependent Variable: ERS (Supervisor Performance Report)

Low Formal Procedures	High Formal Procedures	F(1, 251)= 2.27, p= .13
3.86 (.83)	4.01 (.77)	

N=275

Table 4

Univariate ANOVAs Results: SLMX and Distributive Justice

Dependent Variable: ERS (Supervisor Performance Report)

	Low SLMX	High SLMX		
Low Distributive Justice	3.44 (.78)	4.23 (.67)		
High Distributive Justice	3.64 (.75)	4.28 (.66)		
			F	p
Distributive Justice Main Effect			3.59	.31
SLMX Main Effect			104.38	.06
Interaction (DJ X SLMX) Effect			.59	.44

N=275

Table 5

Univariate ANOVAs SLMX X Interactional Justice

Dependent Variable: ERS (Supervisor Performance Report)

	Low SLMX	High SLMX		
Low Interactional Justice	3.34 (.75)	4.17 (.69)		
High Interactional Justice	3.72 (.75)	4.31 (.64)		

	F	p
Interactional Justice Main Effect	4.02	.29
SLMX Main Effect	30.84	.11
Interaction (IJ X SLMX) Effect	2.05	.15

N=275

Table 6

Univariate ANOVA Results SLMX X Procedural Justice

 Dependent Variable: ERS (Supervisor Performance Report)

	Low SLMX	High SLMX		
Low Formal Procedures	3.36 (.77)	4.32 (.57)		
High Formal Procedures	3.70 (.74)	4.21 (.72)		
			F	p
Procedural Justice Main Effect			.27	.70
SLMX Main Effect			10.78	.19
Interaction (PJ X SLMX) Effect			6.20	.01

 N=275

Figure 1 : Response Surface of SLMX, Procedural Justice and Performance

