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Leader-member exchange and follower trust in leader: The moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity

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Abstract

This research attempts to explain the moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity on the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader. Accordingly, quantitative data, collected via survey administration to front-line employees of service-rendering companies from Istanbul was used to test the hypotheses. The findings of this study revealed that the strength of leader emotional expressivity weakened the positive contributions of LMX to follower trust in leader for leaders who engage in a high level of LMX. On the other hand, higher leader emotional expressivity compensates for the low levels of LMX relationship in terms of increasing follower trust in leader.

Keywords: Leadership, emotions, leader-member exchange, leader emotional expressivity, follower trust in leader

1. Introduction

Leader-member exchange (LMX) describes the quality of the reciprocal relationship that is formed between employees and supervisors (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). LMX theory asserts that limitations of the supervisor's time and resources restrict the number of high-quality exchange co-operations the supervisor can establish with subordinates. Therefore, the supervisor determines a narrow group of subordinates with whom he or she shares socioemotional resources that will result in augmented reciprocal trust, liking, and esteem. This social exchange relationship ensures that selected subordinates obtain more abundant resources from the supervisor and the supervisor acquires enhanced performance and devotion of competent employees. In contrast, low-quality relationships are restricted to the exchange of determinate contractual resources (Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Liden & Graen, 1980).

Emotions are omnipresent in leader-follower interactions, originating from and also affecting them (Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). Because leaders have a deep influence on the activity of organizations and their insiders (Yukl, 2005), leader emotional expositions have solid capacity to affect how their subordinates feel, think, and act (George, 2000).

In this study, the contribution of LMX to the follower trust in leader, as well as the moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity on the relationship between LMX and follower trust in leader were analyzed.

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2. Literature review

2.1. Leader-member exchange and follower trust in leader

LMX theory is based on vertical dyad linkage theory (VDL) set forth by Graen and his colleagues (e.g. Cashman, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1976; Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975). The fundamental premise of VDL theory was that leaders distinguish among employees in the way they lead them (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) so that the leader forms a much closer relationship with certain employees (in-group) and bestows them more "negotiating latitude" than other employees (out-group) (Cashman et al., 1976; Dansereau et al., 1975). Higher-quality exchanges, which are attributed to in-group relationships, are sincere working relationships characterized by reciprocal trust and support (Liden & Graen, 1980), interpersonal appeal (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975), devotion, and bilateral effect (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

Studies on interpersonal trust have exclusively described trust as a prospect by an individual or group that the promise of another individual or group can be relied on (Rotter, 1971, 1980). In addition, trust has been defined as a person's voluntariness to be vulnerable to another party whose actions are not under his or her control (Hosmer, 1995; Zand, 1972) on the basis of the expectation that the other person is qualified, frank, involved, and dependable (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1994).

The underlying premise of social exchange theory is that relationships which supply more benefits than costs, which will bring forth lasting reciprocal trust and appeal (Blau, 1964). Also, social exchange theory enounced that the relationship between supervisors and subordinates transforms into reliable and reciprocal undertakings provided that both parties comply with specific norms of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Trust in leaders is established via conducts such as open communication and integrity (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002); namely, followers' trust in leaders deepens the more often the leaders manifest such favorable psychological abilities (Norman et al., 2010).

Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Leader-member exchange (LMX) will have a positive contribution to follower trust in leader.

2.2. The moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity on the relationship between leadermember exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader

According to Rousseau et al.'s (1998) definition, trust is a "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (p. 395). Departing from the social exchange theory by Blau (1964), which is based upon the exchange of gestures of goodwill, we suggest that for leaders who try to be viewed by their followers as "transparent" and enact their true feelings, followers will perceive them as real human beings with sincere feelings and therefore as vulnerable, and so, followers will be able to see the goodwill behind their leaders' actions. As a result, followers' trust in their leaders will be augmented and they will try to reciprocate by expressing their goodwill as well. Therefore, we suggest that in case of leaders who engage in a lower level of leader-member exchange, a stronger leader emotional expressivity will compensate for the lack of leader-member exchange relationship, and increase their perception as being trustworthy leaders by their followers. In contrast, for

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leaders who engage in a high level of LMX, a strong leader emotional expressivity will be perceived by followers as a leader who is expressing an overly-possessive leadership and as someone who is crossing a boundary when interacting with followers.

In sum, we expect that leader emotional expressivity (LEE) will compensate for the negative implications of a low level of leader-member exchange (LMX) by encouraging trust in leader by followers. If a leader engages in a low level of leader-member exchange relationship, and if this leader demonstrates a high level of leader emotional expressivity, then this high level of leader emotional expressivity will compensate for the lack of LMX by increasing follower trust in leader. On the other hand, if a leader already demonstrates a high level of LMX, in this case, a high level of emotional expressivity by the same leader will be perceived by the followers of this leader as intimidating and they will feel that their leader is crossing a boundary when interacting with them. Therefore, followers' trust in leader will again increase, however less strongly as compared to strong-LMX leaders who demonstrate a lower level of emotional expressivity. Namely, if leaders engaging in a high level of LMX relationship with their followers demonstrate a lower level of emotional expressivity, then there will be a more positive relationship between LMX and follower trust in leader, in comparison to leaders who demonstrate a higher level of emotional expressivity. In other words, if a high-LMX leader does not express a very high level of emotional expressivity, then follower trust in leader will increase more strongly with increasing leader leader-member exchange (LMX). Thus, we came up with the following hypothesis:

H2. The relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader will be moderated by leader emotional expressivity (LEE), in such a way that the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader is more positive for those employees whose leaders are lower on LEE as compared to those whose leaders are higher on LEE.

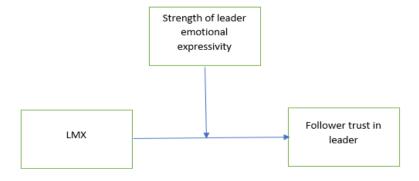
3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The aim of this study is to test the contribution of leader-member exchange (LMX) to follower trust in leader. In addition, this study aims to test the moderating effect of the strength of leader emotional expressivity on the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader.

The model depicting the hypothetical relationships is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study



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A survey was undertaken in order to test the hypotheses with the aim of testing both the contribution of leader-member exchange to follower trust in leader and finding out the moderating effect of the strength of leader emotional expressivity on the relationship between leader-member exchange and follower trust in leader. The participants were asked to rate their perception of the leader-member exchange and emotional expressivity of their actual leaders, and then they were asked to rate their own actual level of trust in leader. Leader-Member Exchange Scale by Scandura and Schriesheim (1994) and Emotional Expressivity Scale by Kring et al. (1994) were utilized for the participants to rate their actual leader. In addition, for the ratings of follower trust in leader, the items of the Trust in Supervisor Scale by İnelmen (2009) was used. The questions were read to the participants and their answers were recorded on a tablet PC.

3.2. Sample

A total of 258 employees working in the services departments from 32 firms and their immediate supervisors were contacted. The average age of the employees is 28.64, ranging from18 to 62. 94 (36.4%) of the contacted employees are female. 42 (16.3%) of the contacted employees attended only elementary school, 160 (62%) are high school graduates, 54 (20.9%) attended university, and 2 (0.8%) completed higher education. In contrast, 19 (7.4%) of their immediate supervisors finished elementary school, 107 (41.5%) graduated from high school, and 132 (51.2%) are university graduates. The average working years add up to 8.20, ranging from 1 to 40, and the average tenure is 3.69 years, ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 20 years. 90 (34.9%) of the total of 258 respondents are from the retail industry, 49 (19%) work in the food industry, 48 (18.6%) come from the textile industry, 17 (6.6%) work in the IT sector, 12 (4.7%) are from the electronics industry, 10 (3.9%) work in the financial industry, 8 (3.1%) come from the construction industry, another 8 (3.1%) work in the paper industry, and again another 8 (3.1%) are hired in the agricultural industry, 6 (2.3%) deal with trade, and lastly 2 (0.8%) are employed in customer services.

4. Findings of the study

Regression analysis has been undertaken in order to test the contribution of leader-member exchange to follower trust in leader. For the regression analysis, two models have been created. The first model tests the effect of control variables on the dependent variable, and the second model tests the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable, in addition to the effect of the control variables on the dependent variable.

For the measurement of the contribution of leader-member exchange on follower trust in leader, the multiple regression models are expressed as follows:

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Model 1: Follower trust in leader = \beta_0 + \beta_1*(Age) + \beta_2*(Gender) + \beta_3*(Tenure) + \epsilon
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Model 2: Follower trust in leader = $\beta_0 + \beta_1*(Age) + \beta_2*(Gender) + \beta_3*(Tenure) + \beta_4*(LMX) + \epsilon$

In these models; age, gender, and tenure are control variables.

The tables 1 and 2 below show the results of the multiple regression analysis:

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Table 1. Model summary of the multiple regression analysis for the contribution of LMX to follower trust in leader

Model Summary											
Model	R	\mathbb{R}^2	Adj.	Std. Er-		Durbin-					
			R^2	ror of the	ΔR^2	ΔF	df1	df2	Sig	Watson	
				Estimate							
									ΔF		
1	.15	.02	.01	.93	.02	1.83	3	254	.14		
2	.87	.76	.75	.46	.74	764.68	1	253	.00	2.03	

Table 2. Regression coefficients for the contribution of LMX to follower trust in leader

Model	Independent	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.	Collinearity	Sta-
	Variables	Coef	ficients	Coefficients			tistics	
		β		β			Tolerance	VIF
			ror					
1	(Constant)	4.25	.32		13.12	.00		
	Age	01	.01	05	53	.60	.54	1.86
	Gender	13	.12	07	-1.03	.30	.99	1.01
	Tenure	03	.02	09	-1.05	.30	.54	1.87
2	(Constant)	.45	.21		2.09	.04		
	Age	.00	.01	.02	.40	.69	.54	1.86
	Gender	10	.06	05	-1.59	.11	.99	1.01
	Tenure	.00	.01	.00	.05	.96	.53	1.88
	LMX	.89	.03	.87	27.65	.00	.97	1.03

According to the above tables, LMX ($\beta = 0.87$, t = 27.65, p < .05) significantly predicts follower trust in leader. This model explains 75% of the variance (p < .05). Thus, the hypothesis H1 (Leader-member exchange (LMX) will have a positive contribution to follower trust in leader) is supported.

For the moderation analysis, two models have been created. Along with the control variables, the independent variables of the regression are independent variable, moderator, and the interaction between independent variable and moderator. The first model tests the effect of the control variables on the dependent variable, and the second model tests the effect of the independent variable, the moderator, and the interaction between independent variable and moderator on the dependent variable, in addition to the effect of the control variables on the dependent variable.

The multiple regression models for the moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity (LEE) on the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader are demonstrated as follows:

Model 1: Follower trust in leader = $\beta_0 + \beta_1*(Age) + \beta_2*(Gender) + \beta_3*(Tenure) + \varepsilon$

Model 2: Follower trust in leader = $\beta_0 + \beta_1*(Age) + \beta_2*(Gender) + \beta_3*(Tenure) + \beta_4*(ZLMX)$ + $\beta_5*(ZLEE)$ + ϵ

Model 3: Follower trust in leader = $\beta_0 + \beta_1*(Age) + \beta_2*(Gender) + \beta_3*(Tenure) + \beta_4*(ZLMX)$ + $\beta_5*(ZLEE)$ + $\beta_6*(ZLMX*ZLEE)$ + ϵ

In these models; age, gender, and tenure are control variables.

Table 3 and 4 below demonstrate the moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity (LEE) on the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader.

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Table 3. Model summary of the multiple regression analysis for the moderation of LEE on the relationship between LMX and follower trust in leader

Model Summary											
Model	R	\mathbb{R}^2	Adj.	Std. Er-		Durbin-					
			\mathbb{R}^2	ror of the	ΔR^2 ΔF		df1	df2	Sig. ΔF	Watson	
				Estimate							
1	.15	.02	.01	.93	.02	1.83	3	254	.14		
2	.89	.79	.79	.43	.77	455.08	2	252	.00		
3	.89	.79	.79	.43	.01	6.59	1	251	.01	2.08	

Table 4. Regression coefficients for the moderation of LEE on the relationship between LMX and follower trust in leader

Model	Independent Var- iables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity tistics	·
		β	Std.	В			Tolerance	VIF
		•	Error					
1	(Constant)	4.25	.32		13.12	.00		
	Age	01	.01	05	53	.60	.54	1.86
	Gender	13	.12	07	-1.03	.30	.99	1.01
	Tenure	03	.02	09	-1.05	.30	.54	1.87
2	(Constant)	.66	.25		2.63	.00		
	Age	.00	.01	.02	.53	.60	.54	1.86
	Gender	05	.06	03	87	.39	.97	1.03
	Tenure	01	.01	02	43	.67	.53	1.89
	ZLMX	.61	.06	.59	9.92	.00	.23	4.30
	ZLEE	.26	.04	.28	6.66	.00	.46	2.16
3	(Constant)	3.88	.15		25.47	.00		
	Age	.00	.01	.02	.53	.60	.54	1.86
	Gender	05	.06	03	87	.39	.97	1.03
	Tenure	01	.01	02	43	.67	.53	1.89
	ZLMX	.55	.06	.59	9.92	.00	.23	4.30
	ZLEE	.26	.04	.28	6.66	.00	.46	2.16
	ZLMX*ZLEE	10	.04	12	-2.57	.01	.39	2.59

The above tables illustrate that leader emotional expressivity (LEE) (β = -0.12, t = -2.57, p < .05) moderates the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) on follower trust in leader. While leader emotional expressivity has a positive contribution (β = .28, t = 6.66, p < .05) to the dependent variable of trust in leader, the interaction of leader emotional expressivity with leader-member exchange is negative. The model explains 79% of the variance (p < .05) in the dependent variable. Therefore, H2 (The relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader will be moderated by leader emotional expressivity (LEE), in such a way that the relationship between LMX and follower trust in leader is more positive for those employees whose leaders are lower on LEE as compared to those whose leaders are higher on LEE) is supported.

Figure 2 below shows the moderation chart depicting the moderating effect of LEE on the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader:

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Figure 2. Moderation chart depicting the moderating effect of LEE on the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and follower trust in leader

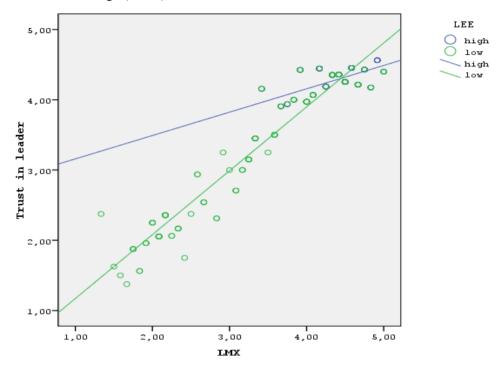


Figure 2 above suggests that the relationship between trust in leader and LMX are more positive for those employees whose leaders are lower on emotional expressivity (low LEE) as compared to those whose leaders are higher on emotional expressivity (high LEE).

5. Discussion and conclusion

As hypothesized and found in H1, followers of leaders with a high level of LMX relationships exhibit a higher level of trust in their leader. According to Dirks and Ferrin (2002), trust in leaders is established via conducts such as open communication and integrity, which is a part of high-quality social exchange relationships.

As hypothesized and found in H2, leader emotional expressivity (LEE) moderates the relationship between leader-member exchange and follower trust in leader. Although leader emotional expressivity has a significant positive contribution to follower trust in leader; parallel to our expectations, higher leader emotional expressivity weakens the positive contributions of leader-member exchange to follower trust in leader for leaders who engage in a high level of leader-member exchange. In line with the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), we assumed that followers would perceive the leaders who give voice to their true feelings as real human beings with sincere feelings and therefore as vulnerable. As a result, followers' trust in their leaders would be augmented and they would try to reciprocate. The results related with our hypothesis indicate that leader emotional expressivity has a positive contribution to follower trust in leader. Also, parallel to our propositions, the strength of leader emotional expressivity weakened the positive contributions of leader-member exchange to follower trust in leader for leaders who engage in a high level of LMX. In other words, if leaders are highly emotionally expressive and if they at the same time demonstrate a high level of leader-member exchange, then the interaction of these two strong qualities results in weaker positive contributions of LMX to follower trust in

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leader. On the other hand, higher leader emotional expressivity compensates for the low levels of LMX in terms of increasing follower trust in leader.

The combination of the engagement of the leader in a high level of leader-member exchange and being highly emotionally expressive may result in an overly-possessive kind of leader-follower relationship in the eyes of the followers, such as in case of an overly possessive relationship between adults and children, where adults have a wish to be fully in control of the situation and attempt to make sure that they will get their fair share of benefits from the relationship (Flasher, 1978). Such a view of the leader by the followers may contribute to the decrease in follower trust in leader. Namely, followers may think that their leader is crossing a boundary with them by being highly emotionally expressive in addition to engaging in a high level of leader-member exchange relationship.

The results of this study also highlight the fact that there can be a leader emotional expressivity premium, in such a way that leaders who engage in a lower level of leader-member exchange relationship with their followers, however, if they are highly emotionally expressive, this high level of emotional expressivity can compensate for their lack of engagement in leader-member exchange relationships. Therefore, followers may commit to a highly emotionally expressive leader even if these followers are not part of the in-group. The existence of a high level of leader emotional expressivity can thus alter the charisma of the leader in parallel with the findings by Bono and Ilies (2006), where mood contagion, through the expression of positive emotions, was one of the psychological mechanisms by which charismatic leaders influence followers.

6. Directions for future research

We suggest that follower characteristics such as individualism or egalitarianism values can be studied in future research in order to be able to interpret the moderation of leader emotional expressivity better. We think that follower characteristics, which were beyond the scope of this research, can play a role in the negative moderating effect of leader emotional expressivity on the relationship between leader-member exchange and follower job outcomes of trust in leader and job performance. For example, followers, if they share an egalitarian point of view, might more strongly regard the highly emotionally expressive leader as crossing a boundary and become intimidated by that leader.

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