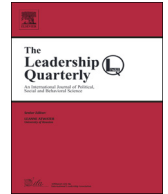




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Effects of relational schema congruence on leader-member exchange

Chou-Yu Tsai^{a,*}, Shelley D. Dionne^b, An-Chih Wang^c, Seth M. Spain^b,
Francis J. Yammarino^b, Bor-Shiuan Cheng^d

^a Department of Management, College of Business and Economics, California State University, Los Angeles, United States

^b Center for Leadership Studies, School of Management, State University of New York, Binghamton, United States

^c Institute of Human Resource Management, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Taiwan

^d Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on social exchange processes in leader-member exchange (LMX), we posit that expressive relational schema (ERS) and instrumental relational schema (IRS), which refer to knowledge structures in social exchange processes, act as antecedents of follower-rated LMX. Specifically, we discuss how leader-follower relational schema congruence/incongruence informs follower-rated LMX. Using polynomial regression models, we analyze 205 leader-follower dyads and test the congruent/incongruent effects on follower-rated LMX. The findings show that ERS congruence has a positive effect on follower-rated LMX, while IRS congruence has a negative effect on follower-rated LMX. Results also demonstrate that ERS incongruence impairs more follower-rated LMX than does ERS congruence, and IRS incongruence and IRS congruence have the same follower-rated LMX. Implications for LMX theory and research are discussed.

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Introduction

Over the past 40 years, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has amassed considerable research attention and become a fruitful research topic in regard to understanding dyadic leadership in the workplace (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Derived from the vertical dyadic linkage approach (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), LMX theory depicts the extent to which a leader and a follower exchange resources and support beyond what is expected based on the formal employment contract (Liden, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2004; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). In low-quality LMX, the exchange between a leader and follower is based mainly on formally agreed-on, immediate, and balanced reciprocation of tangible assets (Blau, 1986). In contrast, in high-quality LMX, the exchange between a leader and follower is characterized by mutual trust, respect, obligation, and liking (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Research has provided substantial evidence that LMX can predict a wide range of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, such as citizenship behaviors (Ilies et al., 2007), job performance (Bauer, Erdogan, Liden, & Wayne, 2006), and various follower consequences (see meta-analyses by Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997).

While outcome-oriented results of LMX have been widely studied, Gerstner and Day (1997) called for more research on the antecedents of LMX. In this regard, one key research stream focuses on the cognitive determinants of LMX (e.g., schemas, implicit theories; Engle & Lord, 1997; Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Huang, Wright, Chiu, & Wang, 2008). Investigations of how information

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: ctsai15@calstatela.edu (C.-Y. Tsai).

is cognitively processed offer a means to understand the source of a leader's influence and how leadership is socially constructed within a leader-follower dyad (Dinh et al., 2014; Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013; Lord & Dinh, 2014; Lord & Maher, 1991). For instance, Epitropaki and Martin (2005) examined the role of implicit leadership theories (i.e., individual leadership schemas) in the LMX process. Their research showed that followers can have better LMX ratings when the difference between the actual perception of their leaders and the leadership schemas endorsed by followers is smaller. Research by Engle and Lord (1997) indicated that both leaders and followers may rely on different cognitive schemas (e.g., leaders rely on performance schemas, whereas followers rely on implicit leadership theories) to process social information, to interpret the others' behaviors, and to make related social judgments. Additionally, research from Huang et al. (2008) and Zhou and Schriesheim (2010) examine how schemas influence cognitive evaluation, with leaders' evaluations of work-related issues and followers' evaluations of social-related issues. As such, prior research on the cognitive determinants of LMX highlights the importance of cognitive schemas in LMX processes in regard to how leaders and followers perceive, interpret, and create expectations from their interactions.

Although the initial findings on the antecedents of LMX highlight the importance of cognitive factors in both leadership and followership, a few issues remain unresolved, which we seek to address here. First, prior leadership research has focused mainly on individual-level cognitive schemas for a leader or follower. Although these implicit cognitive schemas for how a leader or a follower should be or behave play an essential role in the development of exchange relationships between leaders and followers, relational or dyad-level schemas, or a knowledge structure about how a leader-follower relationship should be, may be more proximal to LMX. Prior research findings not only lend support for distinct cognitive contents of an LMX process (i.e., work-related and social-related), but also provide insight into how differences in relational schemas may be at the core of understanding LMX incongruence (i.e., a leader and follower perceive LMX differently).

Knowledge structures usually refer to cognitive schemas, which include scripts, plans, categories, implicit theories, prototypes, or heuristics (Foti & Lord, 1987; Lord & Shondrick, 2011; Shondrick, Dinh, & Lord, 2010). Different information and knowledge (Fiske & Taylor, 2008) are stored and represented abstractly in different schemas, which may provide people with cognitive categories to represent complexities through prototypical characteristics. In this manner, the content of a knowledge structure (schema) is important because the identification of specific schema content may help researchers identify which phenomenon it represents (Walsh, 1988, 1995). Because key premises of LMX are built on social exchange theory (Blau, 1986), the content of how people store supervisor-subordinate exchange relations in their schemas may play an important role in leader-follower reciprocal interactions. As such, this study focuses on the impact of relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992, 1997), a knowledge structure of a social exchange process, held by both leaders and followers, on follower-rated LMX quality.

We choose to focus on follower-rated LMX because of three theoretical concerns: First, follower-rated LMX has positive effects on many important follower outcomes (e.g., job performance; see Bauer et al., 2006). Second, power asymmetry within the relationship between a leader and follower may leave the follower with fewer options for the improvement of an LMX relationship (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). Third, follower-rated LMX is the primary reported source within LMX literature (see Gooty, Serban, Thomas, Gavin, & Yammarino, 2012; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016), meaning that results based on follower-rated LMX are more readily incorporated into the existing LMX literature. Thus, investigating follower-rated LMX may reveal a significant view of a follower's psychological mechanism within the complicated leader-follower dyadic dynamic.

Incorporation of relational schemas into LMX processes represents an advancement of the LMX literature in several ways. First, dyad-level schema research and its association with LMX is scant (for a review, see Epitropaki et al., 2013), and, yet, the role that relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992, 1997) play in dyadic-based leadership theory (e.g., LMX) provides a potentially important theoretical alignment of the level-of-analysis issues related to leader-follower processes. Thus, movement from individual-level implicit theories about a leader or follower toward more interactive-based relational schemas seems particularly important for interpreting the leader-follower processes within LMX.

Second, prior research assumes that similarity in cognitive schemas relates to favorable LMX quality regardless of the schema content (Lord & Maher, 1991). We assert that different relational schemas, such as expressive (i.e., beliefs that leaders and followers should be emotionally attached to each other) and instrumental (i.e., beliefs that leader-follower relationships are nothing more than a purely economic exchange) (see Baldwin, 1992, 1997), could potentially influence the LMX experience in different ways, even when leaders and followers hold similar views.

Third, to better understand the effects of cognitive congruence between leaders and followers, we employ a framework from self-other agreement research (Atwater, Wang, Smither, & Fleenor, 2009; Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010) and test our assertions using polynomial regression and response surface methodology (Edwards, 2007; Edwards & Parry, 1993), which not only offers a rigorous test of congruence effects but also enables a direct comparison between congruence and incongruence (for a review, see Edwards, 2002). Therefore, understanding the consequences of congruency and/or incongruency amid differing types of relational schemas between leaders and followers can enhance our understanding of LMX relations and ratings. We consider the implications of leader-follower relational schema congruence as an antecedent of follower-rated LMX through field research using leader-follower dyads in business organizations.

Theoretical development and hypotheses

Leader-member exchange theory

Leader-member exchange (LMX) is rooted in role theory (Graen & Scandura, 1987), which contends that active role-taking, role-making, and role-routinization processes for leader and follower move the de facto relationship away from a contractually

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