



# Lack of sleep and the development of leader-follower relationships over time



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## ABSTRACT

Drawing from the sleep and emotion regulation model, and attribution theory, we argue that sleep can influence the quality of the relationship between leaders and their followers. Specifically, we examined the effects of lack of sleep on leader-follower relationship development at the beginning of their dyad tenure. We hypothesized that the negative effects of lack of sleep on relationships are mediated by hostility. Results based on 86 new dyads (first three days of their work relationship) showed support for our hypotheses (Study 1). Results based on 40 leaders and 120 followers over three months (five waves) also showed that lack of sleep influences perceptions of relationship quality via hostility for both leaders and followers (Study 2). Moreover, we found that the direct effects of follower lack of sleep affect leader perceptions of relationship quality in the first month of their dyad tenure but decreasingly so over time; the direct effects of a leader lack of sleep on follower perceptions of relationship quality did not vary based on dyad tenure. Results revealed that individuals are not aware of the impact of their own lack of sleep on other people's perceptions of relationship quality, suggesting that leaders and followers may be damaging their relationship without realizing it.

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## 1. Introduction

Organizations often benefit when leaders and followers develop high-quality relationships (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Meta-analyses on leader-member exchange theory (LMX) have consistently found that the quality of relationships is positively related to organizational commitment, perceptions of justice, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), and job performance (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Martin, Yues, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2015). Leaders develop unique relationships with each of their subordinates over time (Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Ilies, 2009), and initial interactions have a disproportionate influence on the formation of these work relationships (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Liden & Graen, 1980). Nevertheless, relationship development is influenced by many contextual and relational cues (Bartz & Lydon, 2006; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Considering that a person's sleep tends to vary over time (e.g., Barnes, Schaubroeck,

Huth, & Ghumman, 2011; Barnes, Wagner, & Ghumman, 2012), influences the manner that people interact (Cartwright & Knight, 1987; Hasler & Troxel, 2010; Strawbridge, Shema, & Roberts, 2004; Troxel, Buysse, Hall, & Matthews, 2009), and affects the experience and suppression of negative emotions (e.g., Barnes, 2012), we focus on sleep as a potential dynamic characteristic that influences the formation of leader and follower relationship via negative emotions. We thus argue that sleep can influence the quality of future exchanges (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997) via projected hostile cues (Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2016; Todorov & Porter, 2014).

We draw from the sleep and emotion regulation model (Barnes, 2012), and attribution theory (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973; Ross & Fletcher, 1985) to extend LMX theory. In integrating the literature on sleep to emotions, Barnes (2012) theorized that sleep deprivation augments the experience of negative affect and undermines the sleep-deprived person's ability to suppress it. Thus, sleep-deprived people tend to be more emotionally reactive, especially with negative emotions (Gujar, Yoo, Hu, & Walker, 2011). We posit that sleep influences the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers via these harmful effects on emotions. Specifically, we argue that sleep-deprived leaders and followers expose each other to hostility, a discrete negative and

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other-oriented emotion (Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003), which then diminishes their relationship quality.

Researchers on attribution theory posit that individuals naively interpret events based on limited information and attribute observed cues either to the situation or to the actor (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1973; see Ross & Fletcher, 1985 for a review). Individuals, nevertheless, tend to make internal attributions to observed cues (i.e., fundamental attribution error; see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990 for a review). We argue that the negative effects of a lack of sleep on leader–follower relationships should be especially important at the beginning of the relationship when leaders and followers are getting to know each other and do not have a broad set of observations to evaluate the stability of emotional cues. Later in their tenure, leaders and followers can integrate a wider set of observations when attributing the causal relationship to the individual or situation. Leaders and followers, therefore, are more likely to make internal attributions early in their dyadic tenure.

Moreover, previous research highlights that sleep-deprived people are often unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge how a lack of sleep can negatively influence their behavior (Banks & Dinges, 2007; Mullins, Cortina, Drake, & Dalal, 2014; Van Dongen, Maislin, Mullington, & Dinges, 2003). It is possible, therefore, that the hostility cues triggered by lack of sleep are sent to the other party without the actor's awareness. This is potentially of interest given that leaders and followers often do not agree in their perceptions of relationship quality (Sin, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2009). Thus, sleepy followers can undermine the way that their leaders perceive their relationships, but the followers can remain unaware of this effect. By the same token, sleepy leaders can unwittingly harm their followers' perceptions of their relationships. Therefore, we focus on both leader and follower evaluations of the quality of their relationship, which is different from the general stream of research on leader–follower relationship that is one-sided and has focused mainly on the follower perspective (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994) (see Fig. 1).

We begin with a review of the literature on leader–follower relationships. We then explain how sleep influences the development of leader–follower relationships. Next we integrate hostility as a causal mechanism connecting sleep quantity and perceptions of leader–follower relationships. Finally, we expound that sleep affects self-awareness having detrimental effects on how the other party evaluates the quality of their relationship. We test our model in two field studies in which we collected data from leaders and their followers. In Study 1 we collected data from 86 dyads. In study 2 we collected data from 40 leaders and 120 followers over five waves at 15-day intervals.

## 2. A dynamic approach to the development of leader–follower relationships

The development of leader and follower relationships is dynamic and evolves over time (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Leaders

and followers start developing unique relationships through formal and informal processes that occur when they are being assimilated into new positions (Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Nahrgang et al., 2009). Uhl-Bien and Graen (1993) suggest that leaders and followers enter the dyadic relationships as strangers, not knowing if their effort to create good quality relationships will be reciprocated. Given that new dyads are embedded in an uncertain context, leaders and followers are more vulnerable to social and contextual cues (Guarana & Hernandez, 2015) and update their perceptions of the relationship quality over time as they accumulate more information.

Consistent with the embedded dynamism in social interactions, LMX theorists proposed that leader–follower relationships develop over a series of interactions between leaders and followers (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Relationships develop through role taking, role making, and role routinization (Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987). Role taking involves one or more formal episodes in which the leaders communicate and assign roles to their followers. Followers, then, respond and react to leaders' formal request providing feedback on what they are capable of. This is the most dynamic stage in relationship formation, where leaders and followers constantly update their initial evaluations based on the saliency and vividness of new cues (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Hamilton, Katz, & Leirer, 1980).

In role making, leaders and followers take part in unstructured and informal negotiations and requests, and implicit benefits for dedication and loyalty are conferred. Therefore, this process defines whether relationships will be based on economic or social exchanges creating out-groups and in-groups. Relationships, in this stage, start to become stable and less susceptible to new observable cues. Whereas out-group members experience low-quality relationship with low trust, interaction, support, and reward, in-group members enjoy high-quality relationships with high trust, interaction, support, and reward (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

In role routinization, leaders and followers develop an understanding and expectations that result from collaborating in structured and unstructured tasks. This is characterized by perceived obligations on each part to reciprocate, especially in high-quality relationships founded upon social exchanges. The nature of the relationship, then, becomes clear and typically remains stable from this point (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

### 2.1. Lack of sleep, hostility, and leader–follower relationships

As noted above, the development of leader–follower relationship evolves over time until reaching a predictable state of stability. Although research on LMX to date has mainly focused on the stable characteristics of the leader and follower sending consistent signals to the other party (e.g., extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Nahrgang et al., 2009), there is initial evidence that leader and follower relationship development is likely to be influenced by dynamic and less predictable observable cues sent early in their social interactions

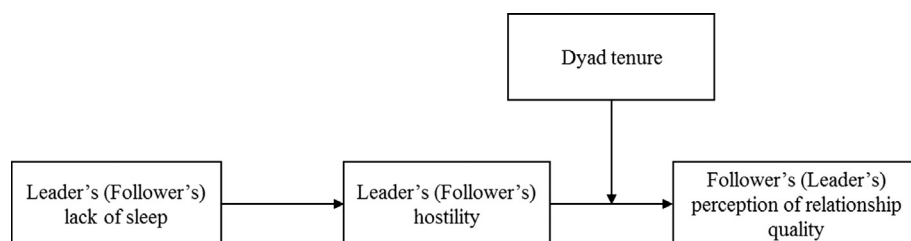


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

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