

Leader – Member Exchange Theory – An Empirical Study on Perceptual Osmosis of employees in a Software Company at Tamil Nadu

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Abstract – A leader-member exchange (LMX) theory focuses on the ‘two-way relationship’ between the leader and the follower and believes that leadership occurs through an effective relationship development of the individuals. Perception is the process by which people select, organize, interpret and respond to information from the world around them. Osmosis is the Process when two solutions of different concentration are separated by a semi-permeable membrane, then the solvent will tend to diffuse across the membrane from the less concentrated to the more concentrated solution. The perceptual Osmosis is the process by which a shift in the perception is kindled, by series of intense intervention, making the low quality LMX category employees to blend up with high quality LMX category employees. This study will facilitate the organization which focus on the two-way relationship between Reporting Managers (RM) and subordinates, aims to maximize organization success by establishing positive interactions between them. This study also examines the how to create a better performing work force by converting people from out-group to in-group members, it leads to the minimum attrition rate in a software company. The authors conducted a study for the sample of 100 employees in the software company. The findings of the study are easy accessibility to the Reporting Manager is the major factor among the employees of a software company. The Interaction level of the Reporting Manager and the Team is in professional lines. This is least preferred by the employees. The Influence of the team on the Reporting Manager mainly depends on Tenure of the employees.

Keywords – Leader, Member, Exchange, Osmosis, Perception and Attrition.

I INTRODUCTION

“When leaders and followers have good exchanges, they feel better, accomplish more, and the organization prospers” – Northouse

Irrespective of the demographical, geographical, cultural, national differences, every individual is unique and different from the fellow human being. The way a person communicates, understands, perceives, responds to the same situation along with the personality, emotions, thought patterns, ability, attitude and the like is different from person to person. At a workforce, people have to be integrated apart from all of these differences, to merge up together for achieving a common organizational goal. A manager/leader cannot treat everyone in the same way due to these differences that is prevailing. Leadership has been widely conceptualized and tested in behavioral psychology, business management, and military studies. The numerous research studies on leadership are hard to classify into categories of approaches (traits, behaviors and styles). There is always a role of the leader in the performance of the team members. When a leader provides closer attention, guidance, feedback, and consideration to a follower, the follower in turn renders exceptional performance to the leader.

The Leader-Member Exchange theory (shortly LMX theory) occupies a unique position among leadership theories because of its focus on the dyadic relationship between leader and follower. LMX theory was originally called Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) theory by Dansereau Graen & Haga (1975). The central for VDL theory is the notion of “support for self-worth” that one individual provides for another. According to LMX Theory, in most leadership situations not every follower is treated the same by the leader, as workforce consists of a diversified work group. Leaders and followers develop dyadic relationships and leaders treat each follower differently, resulting in two groups of followers—an in-group and an out-group. The in-group consists of a few trusted followers with whom the leader usually establishes a special higher quality exchange relationship. The out-group includes the followers with whom the relationship of the leader remains more formal.

LMX is conceptually described as an exchange process, making it appear to be a transactional leadership model, but it is not usually measured this way. Members of the in-group are not told what is expected in return for the rewards they are given as part of a high-quality exchange. Since leaders do not make explicit demands on followers in the form of harder work for these rewards, the relationship might be characterized as transformational. To the extent that LMX measures tap mutual respect, trust, and the overall quality of the working relationship, LMX is oriented toward transformational leadership. LMX is the only leadership approach to consider the dyadic relationship of leader and follower and the exchanges that determine organizational effectiveness. LMX theory asserts that leaders do not interact with subordinates uniformly because supervisors have limited time and resources. One of the implications of this theory is that the nature of the exchange is determined by the leader based on some presumed characteristics of the follower.

Followers get into one of these two groups based on:

- How well they work with the leader
- How well the leader works with them
- Their personalities
- Role responsibilities they assume
- Follower's competencies and accomplishments

'In-group' followers do their jobs in accordance with the employment contracts and can be counted on by the supervisor to perform unstructured tasks, to volunteer for extra work, and to take on additional responsibilities. Supervisors exchange personal and positional resources (inside information, influence in decision-making, task assignment, job latitude, support, and attention) in return for subordinates' performance on unstructured tasks.

As a result of high LMX relationship, the employee can improve in the following factors:

- Mutual trust,
- Confidence,
- Job satisfaction,
- Organizational commitment,
- Common bonds,
- Open communication,
- Independence,
- Respect, rewards & recognition

In contrast, followers who perform only in accordance with the prescribed employment contract are characterized as 'out-group' with limited reciprocal trust and support, and few rewards from their supervisors. Subordinates in the Out-Group may be new to an organization. The In – group is characterized by high trust, interaction, support, and formal/informal rewards. Leaders primarily use expert, referent, and reward power to influence members in this group.

The Out-group is characterized by low trust, interaction, support, and rewards. Leaders mostly use reward, as well as legitimate and coercive power, to influence members of this group. Individuals in high-quality LMX relationships receive more of the leader's time, more information, and higher levels of emotional support and respect than those in low-quality LMX relationships. It has been argued that the quality of the LMX relationship between an employee and the manager, and thus the level of emotional support and valued resources they receive, is "pivotal in determining the member's fate within an organization". Moreover, LMX has been reported to affect an individual's perceptions of organizational support. It has been suggested that managers in high-quality LMX relationships may introduce the employee to key people in their social network, which could lead to additional information being available, as well as to other forms of support and resource availability. The high job demands will not result in burnout if the individual has adequate resources. It also will contribute uniquely to employee well-being. It seems reasonable to expect that individuals in high-quality LMX relationships will experience higher levels of job demands in terms of workload, but will benefit from reduced job demands such as role ambiguity and role conflict vis-à-vis individuals in low-quality LMX relationships. It can also be expected that they will receive higher levels of job resources such as information, social and emotional support, valued resources and job enhancement opportunities like control, participation in decision-making and autonomy.

High-quality exchanges bring positive organizational outcomes such as innovation, empowerment, positive job climate, and organizational citizenship behavior. So, a leader should look for ways to build trust and respect with all of their subordinates, thus making the entire work unit an in-group. When the relationships between leaders and

subordinates are all high quality, “the goals of the leader, the followers, and the organization are all advanced”. Now a day’s software company has a policy of “Employees first Customers Second”. The Organization Effectiveness (OE) function is currently engaged in creating mature people models to leverage human capabilities, thereby generating higher value at the customer-employee interface, which would propel the Company into the next phase of growth globally. At this juncture, a study on the Leader member exchange theory of employees’ aids in identification and grooming of High- Potential employees. This might even be helpful in Software Employee Passion Indicative Count Initiate for individuals to understand their place of belongingness as “in group” or “out group”. For any company to be successful, employees should be satisfied to have higher performance. Thus understanding about the factors contributing to the LMX levels at workplace becomes vital for creating a healthy work environment for the employees with a high performance work force. This paves way in fulfilling the individual at work place with a better comfort zone in the Individual Level, a better Team player, contributing to better Human Capital to the Organization as well.

II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ronald J. Deluga (1994) studied on the employed social exchange and equity theory to investigate the connection among supervisor trust building activity, leader-member exchange (LMX) quality, and subordinate organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) with 86 subordinate-supervisor in a variety of organizations. LMX quality was positively related to subordinate OCB. Liden, Robert C.; Sparrowe, Raymond T.; Wayne, Sandy J. Ferris, Gerald R. ,(1997) identified a number of ways in which theory and empirical research on LMX can be enhanced examining on the ways in which LMXs are embedded in a larger network of exchange relationships. The authors contend that to capture the complexity of LMX, a supplemental LMX measure based on reciprocation in social exchanges is suggested.

Ilies, Remus; Nahrgang, Jennifer D.; Morgeson, Frederick P. (2007) provides a meta-analytic review of the relationship between the quality of leader-member exchanges (LMX) and citizenship behaviors with 50 sample size indicated a moderately strong, positive relationship between LMX and citizenship behaviors. LMX predicted individual targeted behaviors more strongly than it predicted organizational targeted behaviors and the difference was statistically significant. Brenda T. Bernal (2009) proved that high quality LMX relationships play a key role in subordinate’s positive attitude towards work. The higher the quality of the relationships between the leader and the follower, the greater the motivation of the employee to be engaged at work as it manifests better job performance thereby benefiting both the supervisor and the subordinate as well as the entire organization because of the amount and quality of output produced by the subordinate. David Lucia (2010) study described experiences constituting awareness that leaders provide differentiated status and treatment to followers. Certain follower behaviors are viewed as a critical currency of exchange. Personal conversations are conveyed in their descriptions as high-quality experiences and having specific characteristics that differentiate these conversations from transactional low-quality conversations.

Fred C. Lunenburg, (2010) was a secondary data analysis that compresses the outline of the LMX theory discussing how the leader-member exchange theory works; research findings; managerial implications of the theory; and how to build high-quality leader-member exchange relationships with all employees. Baek-Kyoo (Brian) Joo, (2010) examined the influence of leader-member exchange (LMX) quality on in-role job performance and the moderating effect of learning organization culture in a Korean conglomerate. The results indicate that LMX quality had a significant impact on employees’ job performance as rated by their supervisors. Ntsebeza, Castro (2011) examined the relationship between work locus of control, the quality of exchanges between subordinates and leaders (leader-member exchange) and job satisfaction by a non-experimental, cross-sectional mediator design for a sample of 115 employees from all levels of the organization with the exception of members in top management. Mediation regression analysis indicated that leader member exchange partially mediated the relationship between work locus of control and job satisfaction. Amrit Chandrasekaran Sankaran, (2012) investigated the relationship of this LMX agreement to employee’s organizational commitment and turnover intent in the hospitality industry context with 16 hospital establishments in India. It revealed that LMX agreement had a positive relationship with subordinates’ organizational commitment and a negative relationship with subordinates’ turnover intentions. Yolanda B. Truckenbrodt (2000) focused on the two way relationship between supervisors and subordinates, aims to maximize organization success by establishing positive interactions between the two for a sample of 204 full-time employees. The ANOVA results showed a significant relationship between quality of LMX and OCB. Results of the study detailed here suggest that a significant relationship exists between the quality of the supervisor subordinate relationship and subordinates’ commitment and altruistic organizational citizenship behavior. Terri A. Scandura and Graen, G.B (1984) explored the multidimensional nature of trust and how different dimensions may affect LMX quality. Results found support for a nonlinear association between calculus-based trust and LMX. Thus, contrary to expectations, trust appears to be vulnerable even in high-quality LMX relations.

These studies revealed the different dimensions of the Leader – Member exchange theory and its impact on several variables such as organizational commitment, organizational loyalty, job performance, job satisfaction, etc. This helped the researcher in identifying the variables related to the study and the associations between the same. The present study focuses on the measurement factors contributing to the LMX quality among the employees thus to make a perceptual shift targeting on creating better performing work “teams”.

III PROBLEM STATEMENT

Managers unknowingly develop in-group and out-group employees solely based on the individual’s personality type. The relationship between supervisors’ and subordinates’ agreement regarding the nature of their LMX relationship has direct effect on the individual subordinate outcomes of performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. The out-group is very contagious and can easily put in the moderate group employees through the strong grape-vine tool. More the number of out – group members in a team, lesser will be the performance of the group. This study would be helpful to the organization to reduce out-group members in a team.

IV RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Type of Research: Descriptive Research

B. Nature of Respondents

The software company has 2 divisions. Division 1 employees work for manufacturing sector and division 2 employees working for service sector.

C. Sampling Technique

Stratified Random Sampling Technique

D. Sample Size

A well structured questionnaire was distributed to 100 employees. The sample was derived as Process 1 – 50 respondents; Process 2 – 50 respondents of total 100 employees as the sample size. The samples were based on simple random method using table of random numbers from both the process drawn with the help of Employee’s Head Count Deck.

E. Statistical tools

The statistical tools used for data analysis are Weighted Average Method, Correlation Analysis, Chi-square Test, Multiple Regression Analysis and Discriminant Analysis

F. Scope of the Study

This study leads to a study can be done on crating the measure to categorize the team into “ingroup” and “out-group”. This helps to understand the relationship level prevailing between the Reporting Manager and the Team. Another field of study which can be taken up is the study on the stages of LMX in relation to the Group Formation Stages. Further study can be undertaken to understand what factors contribute to the motivation to the “out-group” and “in-group”. This helps to design an interventional plan as to motivate the “out-group” employees. This also helps to align the Reporting Manager into the Organizational perspective of the man power asset, beyond his/her own Individual perspective.

V DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

TABLE I
WEIGHTED AVERAGE METHOD

Sl.No	Factors of LMX	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	Weighted Average	Rank
1	Easy Access	0	2	27	68	365	462	30.8	1
2	Get Along	3	16	30	100	270	419	27.93333	2
3	Influence	15	20	90	68	140	333	22.2	9
4	Interaction	8	40	90	68	125	331	22.06667	10
5	Relationship	5	26	51	104	195	381	25.4	8
6	Understanding	6	8	57	96	235	402	26.8	5
7	Potential Reco	5	12	63	92	225	397	26.46667	6
8	Listening	9	14	75	84	215	392	26.13333	7
9	Fairness	4	10	54	72	275	415	27.66667	3
10	Recognize	3	8	69	76	255	411	27.4	4

It is inferred that the most of the respondents have a quick and easy access to the reporting manager. It also indicates that the interaction with the reporting manager is often task-oriented rather than relationship-oriented. It reveals that despite there is an ease to contact the reporting manager; it is mostly for the task-related issues and not the personal-level, this reflecting on the relationship level of the leader and the member.

CHI SQUARE TEST

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between Tenure and Age of the respondents.

TABLE II
DIRECTIONAL MEASURES

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Symmetric	.122	.098	1.185	.236
	Tenure Classification	.083	.070	1.141	.254
	Lambda Dependent				
	Age Category	.231	.202	1.005	.315
	Nominal Dependent				
	Tenure Classification	.097	.039		.000
Goodman and Kruskal Dependent					
Age Category	.328	.114		.000	
Nominal Dependent					

SYMMETRIC MEASURES

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.572	.000
	Cramer's V	.572	.000
N of Valid Cases		100	

From the Chi-square test output it can be inferred that significance level of .000 has been achieved. This implies there is no significant association between Tenure and Age at 100% confidence level (100 - .000) of the employees. The Cramer's V value is .572. This portrays that the strength of this association has a large effect. The asymmetric lambda value (with Tenure Classification dependent) implies that there is 8.3% of error is reduced in predicting the Tenure when Age is known.

It can be inferred from the output that there is no significant relationship between Tenure period and Age, of the respondents. Dispute the organization has employees from Baby Boomers (67 years to 49 years), Gen X (32 years to 48 years) and Gen Y (32 years to 14 years); the respondents were from Gen X & Gen Y. The result implies that the difference in the age group has no impact on the Tenure of the employee. The reason might be the attitude towards prolonged working in the same organization, has no difference between the differential age group. Factors such as social changes, work pressure, role expectations, and degree of change process in the organization might be contributing for the same.

TABLE III
CORRELATION ANALYSIS
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TENURE AND INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEES

		Tenure Classification	Influence
Tenure Classification	Pearson Correlation	1	-.224
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	100	100
Influence	Pearson Correlation	-.224	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	100	100

The Pearson correlation value is -0.224 implying that there is a negative correlation between the Tenure period and Influence factor. The myth of employees with higher tenure period being treated as a respond of the influence of the team member is not true with the above result. The reporting manager is, hence not influenced by the period of stay of the team members in responding them, some other factor might probably be a contribution.

TABLE IV
REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Dependent Variable:

Y = Influence on Reporting Manager

Independent Variable:

X1 = Gender

X2 = Age Category

X3 = Tenure Classification

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.318	.101	.073	1.327

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.003	3	6.334	3.596	.016
	Residual	169.107	96	1.762		
	Total	188.110	99			

COEFFICIENTS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.220	2.040		1.579	.118
	Gender	.695	.299	.227	2.325	.022
	Tenure Classification	-.372	.166	-.263	-2.241	.027
	Age Category	-.047	.476	-.012	-.100	.921

From the table the equation can be written

$$\text{Influence} = 3.477 + 0.695 (\text{Gender}) - .047 (\text{Age Category}) - .372 (\text{Tenure Classification})$$

From the above equation it can be inferred that if Gender is an important independent variable to predict the Influence factor (by .695). The table infers that Gender is independent to the access factor as there is Positive Coefficient.

The strength of association is measured by co-efficient of determination denoted by R². This co-efficient usually varies between 0 and 1 .This table shows R² value is 0.101, the t-test for the significance level at 0.05 at a confidence level of 95%, Gender is significant statistically in this factor.

TABLE V
DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS FOR RM – TEAM MEMBER SIMILARITY PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES

GROUP STATISTICS

Similarity		Valid N (listwise)	
		Unweighted	Weighted
Yes	Gender	68	68.000
	Tenure Classification	68	68.000
	Age Category	68	68.000
No	Gender	32	32.000
	Tenure Classification	32	32.000
	Age Category	32	32.000
Total	Gender	100	100.000
	Tenure Classification	100	100.000
	Age Category	100	100.000

EIGEN VALUES

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	.018	100.0	100.0	.134

WILK'S LAMBDA

Test of Function(s)	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	.982	1.747	3	.626

CANONICAL DISCRIMINANT COEFFICIENT FUNCTION

	Function
	1
Gender	.243
Tenure Classification	1.035
Age Category	.201

STRUCTURE MATRIX

	Function
	1
Tenure Classification	.957
Age Category	-.397
Gender	.368

CANONICAL DISCRIMINANT

COEFFICIENTS

	Function
	1
Gender	.537
Tenure Classification	1.066
Age Category	.592
(Constant)	-4.684

FUNCTIONS AT GROUP

CENTROIDS

Similarity	Function
	1
Yes	-.092
No	.195

The Discriminant function is able to classify 61% for the 100 respondents. The value of Wilks’ lambda is 0.982 which is closer to 1 rather than 0. Hence, the discriminating power of the model is not good.

The probability value of chi-square test indicates that discrimination between two groups is not significant because the significance value is 0.626, which is greater than 0.05.

Among the three independent variables, the best predictor for the RM – Team member similarity is Tenure Classification with a higher coefficient of 1.066.

The Unstandardized Discriminant function is,

$$Y = -4.684 + 0.592 (\text{Age Category}) + 0.537 (\text{Gender}) + 1.066(\text{Tenure Classification}),$$

where Y is RM – Team members similarity of employees.

VI FINDINGS

1. The Easy accessibility to the Reporting Manager is the major factor among the employees of a software company. The Interaction level of the Reporting Manager and the Team is in professional lines. This is least preferred by the employees.
2. There is no significant association between Tenure and Age among employees.
3. There is a negative correlation between tenure and influence behavior of employees
4. The Influence of the team on the Reporting Manager mainly depends on Tenure of the employees.
5. The Discriminant function is classified as 61%. The best predictor for the RM – Team member similarity is Tenure Classification.

VII SUGGESTIONS

- As the weighted factor portrays the interaction between the Reporting Manager & the Team is quite good, on professional line, activities can be conducted to overcome communication gaps is to be considered. The in-group and out-group to be identified to have a series of intervention with the low level exchange group to have a perceptual shift in their relationship with the Reporting Manager.
- The Reporting Managers are to be given a special training, sensitizing them to overlook on the personal believes and to insist on positive reinforcement's impact on employee productivity.
- According to LMX theory, attraction between the Reporting Manager & the Employees might be affected by the amount of interaction that occurs between the leader and the member. Management games such as Role play; Team Work, etc can be adopted within teams. This brings in the empathized view on the team, on the whole.
- Persons who are similar are more likely to interact frequently causing an increase in the level of familiarity, which might also influence the level of attraction within an LMX relationship. Team get-together can be arranged once a year or bi-annually, as "Family Day". This creates a better understanding amongst the team members.
- Increased interaction may result in higher levels of trust. Leaders tend to trust In-group subordinates and therefore empower them with decision making authority. Leaders use delegation, not as a test of the member's abilities, but as a reward for excellent past performance and as a sign of respect and consideration. Therefore, as trust between the leader and the member increases, the number of delegated responsibilities from the leader to the member, and consequently, the quality of the LMX relationship also increases. Training on trust development and importance of trust building in a work environment can be brought into light.
- Reporting Managers are to encourage creativity in the workplace using various tactics and behaviors of the team, understanding the strengths of each individual of the team.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study reveals the relationship at work. It also gave a perception of how the leadership style of different leaders creates perceptual errors, resulting in unhealthy work environment. The authors have applied the concept of "LMX – a Perceptual Osmosis" among employees of a software company. This was an action plan that contained a series of intense training program conducted by the authors adopting Projective techniques, Psycho-metric measures, Focus Group Discussion, Feedback and Group counseling were used to understand the gap existing between Employees - Reporting Manager and to make a perceptual shift. The action plan contained the following:

1. "You are Special" – The Positive Chart from RM
2. "Be the Difference" – A Psycho - Transformational workshop for Team members
3. "Smiley Feedback" – An Articulation to the RM
4. "Managing High Performance Work Team" – An alerted RM style

The organization has well organized activities that prioritize the individual employees than its customers. This study will help the organization to reduce attrition rate and also it create a better performing work force.

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