AN LMX-BASED MODEL OF AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

We tested whether LMX quality relates to followers’ reported level of affective commitment, mediated by the role of experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for work, and knowledge of results. We found that job characteristics mediated the relationship between LMX quality and affective commitment, providing support for the social exchange view of the LMX model of leadership (Blau, 1964).

Employees with stronger affective organizational commitment have greater intrinsic motivation, more autonomous forms of external regulation and a stronger promotion focus in the pursuit of goals (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenbergehe, 2004). Consistent with this contention is evidence that affective commitment is positively related to job performance, extra-role behaviors, low absenteeism and a reduced likelihood of quitting ones jobs (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982).

The present study examines potential proximal and distal antecedents of affective commitment. Specifically, the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships (Leader-member exchange; Bauer & Green, 1996), elements of job design (Hackman & Oldman, 1976) and affective organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) are examined.

This study contributes to the scant empirical literature on the relationships between LMX quality, job enrichment, and affective commitment. Since causation can only be established using strong experimental study designs with high internal validity, as a first step we decided to conduct a nonexperimental field study where cross-sectional data was collected. We rely heavily on theory that suggests the causal ordering of variables (Scheines, 2005). In the present study, we do not claim to test
causal ordering; however, we believe that there are sufficiently strong theoretical imperatives supporting the causal ordering suggested here. The empirical contribution of the present study involves testing mediation hypotheses that integrate theoretical arguments for the relationships among LMX quality, followers’ job enrichment, and affective commitment (Figure 1).

Social exchange (Blau, 1964) and the norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) have been used by researchers to describe the motivational basis of employee behaviors and the formation of positive employee attitudes (Etzioni, 1961; March & Simon, 1958). In general, research suggests that positive actions directed at employees by their organizations contribute to the development of high quality exchange relationships (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994) and create obligations for employees to reciprocate in positive beneficial ways (Eisengbeger et al., 1986).

Leader-member exchange (LMX; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997) theory of leadership arises from the tenets of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Sullivan, Mitchell & Uhl-Bien, 2003), and is premised on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960). It suggests that leaders’ relationships with subordinates can range from those based solely on the formal employment contract (low LMX) to those that are characterized by mutual trust, respect and reciprocal influence (high LMX; Dansereau et al., 1975; Liden & Graen, 1980). Low quality LMX members experience instrumental, quid pro quo exchanges where followers receive standard benefits (e.g., work enrichment) in exchange for complying with formal job requirements (Lapierre, Hackett & Taggar, 2006).
Figure 1

Partially-Mediated Model

All paths were significant at $p < .001$. 

LMX and Job Enrichment
On the other hand, in high quality LMX relationships, followers provide leaders with valuable work-related contributions, such as, striving to add to the value of assignments, actively seeking out new job assignments, persisting on projects after others give up, and influencing others by doing something extra (Graen, 2003). That is, through extra effort fulfilling supervisor requests and engaging in extra role behaviors, employees maintain their high quality LMX relationship (Settoon, Bennet & Liden, 1996). In return, leaders nurture high quality LMX relationships by providing job enrichment (Bauer & Green, 1996; Lapiere, Hackett, & Taggar 2006; Yukl, 1994), offering inducements such as influence and support (Graen & Scandura, 1987). In turn, these create obligations in the followers to reciprocate.

According to the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldman, 1976), job enrichment satisfaction is a function of skill variety (the degree to which the job requires the performance of a variety of different activities), task identity (degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work), task significance (degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the work of others), autonomy (extent to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion), and feedback (degree to which the individual receives direct and clear information about their effectiveness). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

**H1)** LMX quality will be positively associated with (a) skill variety, (b) task identity, and (c) task significance.

**H2)** LMX quality will be positively associated with job autonomy.

**H3)** LMX quality will be positively associated with feedback.

**LMX and Psychological States**

The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldman, 1976) suggests that LMX may impact work attitudes through job enrichment and the presence of critical psychological states. Experienced meaningfulness of work results from task variety, task identity and skill variety, responsibility for outcomes results from autonomy, and knowledge of results from feedback. These states influence job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldman, 1976) and may be associated with feelings of empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).
In sum, high quality LMX relationships may result in leaders providing enriched jobs to followers. Deci, Connell and Ryan (1989) state that “the interpersonal work climate created by managers for their subordinates contributes directly to the subordinate’s feelings of self worth and self-determination (Deci et.al, 1989, pg.580; see also Sparrow, 1994; Uhl-Bien &Graen, 1993). Consistent with this, Hackman and Oldman (1976) argue that positive psychological states result form job enrichment. Hence, we posit:

H4) LMX quality and experienced meaningfulness of work will be positively related with the relationship mediated by (a) skill variety, (b) task identity and (c) task significance.

H5) LMX quality and experienced responsibility for outcomes will be positively related with the relationship mediated by autonomy.

H6) LMX quality and experienced knowledge of results will be positively related with the relationship mediated by feedback.

LMX and Affective Commitment

Prior research on the dynamics of leader member exchange process has found that LMX is positively related to organizational commitment (Duchon, Green & Taber, 1986), satisfaction with supervision (Schriesiem & Gardner, 1992), satisfaction with work (Vecchio & Gobel, 1984) and organizational citizenship behaviors (Wayne &Green, 1993). However, the mechanism through which LMX impacts work attitudes remains unclear. Similarly, enriched jobs can be motivating and can potentially lead to positive attitudes (Hackman & Oldman, 1976). Numerous studies indicate that positive work conditions contribute to affective commitment (Leong, Huang, & Hsu, 2003; Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). Job enrichment may result in identification and involvement with the organization, while individuals experiencing low levels of job enrichment may experience a feeling of work alienation (Hirschfeld & Field, 2000; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1981).

Meyer and Allen (1990) define affective organizational commitment as an employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Affectionally committed employees exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Mowday et.al, 1982). Meyer and Allen, (1990) found that job challenge, goal difficulty, feedback, employee participation in decision making regarding work roles were antecedents of affective commitment. Dunham, Grube & Castaneda (1984) also examined antecedents of affective commitment including job characteristics, i.e., task
autonomy, task significance, task identity, skill variety, and supervisory feedback, organizational dependability (the extent to which employees feel the organization can be counted on to look after their interests), and perceived participatory management (the extent to which employees feel that they can influence decisions regarding the work environment). The use of these antecedents was consistent with previous findings by researchers such as Steers (1977) and Mottaz (1988) and these factors were expected to create rewarding situations intrinsically conducive to the development of affective commitment. The study indicated that anticipated relationships between affective commitment and the antecedent variables were generally observed. Specifically, affective commitment was positively related to organizational dependability, participatory management practices and the five job design dimensions.

In conceptualizing a leader-member exchange based model of the antecedents of affective commitment, it seems that social exchange processes (Blau, 1964; Sullivan, Mitchell & Uhl-Bien, 2003) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) may influence leaders to enrich follower’s jobs. This enrichment results in follower motivation and positive psychological states according to the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldman, 1976). Positive psychological states, reflecting a heightened motivational state that may serve to create job satisfaction, may also serve to create the attitude of affective commitment. Hence, we posit, that:

\[ H7 \] (a) Skill variety, (b) task identity and (c) task significance will be positively related to affective commitment with the relationship mediated by experienced meaningfulness of work.

\[ H8 \] Autonomy will be positively related to affective commitment with the relationship mediated by experienced responsibility for outcomes.

\[ H9 \] Feedback will be positively related to affective commitment with the relationship mediated by knowledge of results.

**Method**

**Participants**

Questionnaires were randomly administered to 581 members of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), a national non-profit organization concerned with the theory and practice of public management. IPAC’s membership was a valuable population from which to draw our
sample since it comprises followers across a variety of job types and levels within the Canadian government.

We received 381 useable questionnaires, for a response rate of 66 per cent. The sample consisted of 38% senior managers, 2% administrative staff, 1% technical staff, 16% professionals, 15% policy staff, 24% middle managers and 4% first-line supervisors (51% women, 94% full-time / permanent employees). In terms of organizational tenure, 9% had less than 3 years, 16% had 3–10 years, 31% had 11–20 years and 42% had more than 20 years tenure.

In terms of tenure in their current department, 37% reported less than 3 years’ tenure, 32% had spent 3–10 years, 19% had spent 11–20 years and 11% had spent more than 20 years in their current department. For age, 7% of participants were between 20 and 29 years, 56% were between 30 and 39 years, none were between 40 and 49 years, 35% were between 50 and 59 years, and 2% were over 60 years. Finally, with respect to annual salary (in Canadian dollars), 1% earned less than $30,000, 4% earned between $30,000 and $39,000, 7% earned between $40,000 and $49,000, 13% earned between $50,000 and $59,000, 15% earned between $60,000 and $69,000, 17% earned between $70,000 and $79,000, and 43% earned more than $80,000. Sample demographics were similar to those of IPAC’s total membership.

**Measures**

In all cases, items were coded so that high values represent high levels of the construct.

**Leader–member exchange quality.** We used Schriesheim et al.’s (1992) LMX-6 (six-item) scale to capture the three dimensions of the LMX relationship described by Dienesch and Liden (1986), namely contribution (i.e. the extent to which the follower perceives the leader as valuing the follower’s work contributions), loyalty (congruence between follower and leader work goals), and affect (satisfaction with the leader). This scale relates highly (.82) with Scandura and Graen’s (1984) LMX-7 scale (Schriesheim et al., 1992), reflecting considerable inter-scale convergence. This value exceeds 70, the generally accepted minimum value for internal consistency reliability (Nunnally, 1978), suggesting that the LMX-6 and the LMX-7 are consistently measuring the LMX construct.

We used a 7-point scale instead of Schriesheim et al.’s (1992) 5-point scale in order to remain consistent with other multiple-item measures in our questionnaire that used a 7-point response scale.
Adapting the LMX-6 measure to a 7-point response scale is unlikely to have influenced its validity given Spector’s (1980) research findings showing that modifications to response scales that do not change their general nature (i.e. level of agreement with item, perceived frequency of behavior described in item) have no significant effect on how the measure relates to other variables. Cronbach’s alpha in our sample was .77, which is similar to the reliability estimates of .80 and .81 reported by Schriesheim et al. (1992).

**Job diagnostic survey and job enrichment.** The five core job dimensions and the three psychological states were measured with the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS: Hackman & Oldham, 1975. 1980). The reader is referred to Hackman and Oldham (1980) for a listing of the items for each scale, and to Fried and Ferris (1987) and Taber and Taylor (1990) for reviews on the psychometric properties of these measures.

We discarded the JDS autonomy measure for the Koys and DeCotiis’ (1991) autonomy scale because it showed weaker reliability in our sample (.75 vs. .84). Items are “I make most of the decisions that effect the way my job is performed”, “I determine my own work procedure”, “I schedule my own work activities”, “I set the performance standards for my job” and “I organize my work as I see best”. Response options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a seven-point Likert scale.

We used the “JDS feedback from the organization’s agents” scale and we did not include the JDS “feedback from the job itself” scale in our composite since previous work suggests leaders could have less influence over this particular job characteristic (Cordery & Wall, 1985). Hackman and Oldham (1980) stated that the latter job characteristic refers to “feedback obtained directly from the job, as when a television repairman turns on the set and finds that it works (or doesn’t work) after being repaired” (p. 80). Compared to other job characteristics, it is less clear whether a supervisor’s provision of more enriched work would include giving the employee more job tasks that, by their very nature, provide employees with feedback on how they are performing.

**Affective commitment.** Affective commitment was measured using Meyer, Allen, & Smith’s (1993) 8-item scale. Sample items include “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my life with this organization” and “I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own”. Response options ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a seven-point Likert scale, but prior to analyses scale cores were reversed for high scores represent greater commitment. This scale has been widely used in research and in the field. Coefficient alpha was .85. A detailed discussion of the construct validity of this scale is found in Allen and Meyer (1996).
Methods used to reduce response bias

Research has provided compelling empirical evidence that the inflation of the relationship between variables due to the exclusive use of self-report measures is quite small (Crampton & Wagner, 1994; Spector, 1987; Wagner & Gooding, 1987). Still, in order to reduce the already weak probability that our observed relationships would be biased by our research method, we followed recommendations by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003).

First, we clearly informed all respondents that their responses would be kept confidential. We avoided asking for personal information that would give the impression that responses would not be anonymous (e.g. name of respondent, name of leader, work location), and we provided respondents with ordered response categories instead of asking for exact information when measuring personal demographic data that might reveal their identity to superiors (see Table 1). Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggested that anonymity reduces the extent to which social desirability taints responses and potentially biases study results. Because the response scale for our LMX measure is different from the Likert and frequency-based response scales used for the other measures, we were able to ensure some “methodological separation” (Podsakoff et al., 2003) between the variables addressed in some of our hypotheses. Varying response formats across variables (e.g., JDI measures) would likely diminish respondents’ ability and motivation to use their prior responses to answer subsequent questions, thus reducing demand characteristics and the likelihood of a consistency bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

A final method used to reduce demand characteristics and subsequent response bias was to measure job characteristics with scale items that make no reference to respondents’ leader. Since we did not ask respondents whether their leader had provided them with more or less job enrichment, the scales we chose to measure job enrichment were more likely to reduce the demand characteristics of our survey questionnaire, which could have biased the relationships among our variables, especially between LMX quality and job enrichment.

Results

Our hypotheses specify mediation. Structural equation modeling is considered the preferred method of testing mediation (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Hoyle and Smith (1994) describe a simple strategy to test mediation models in structural equation modeling. As in regression, if the predictor-outcome path is not significant with the mediator added to the model, there is evidence of complete mediation.
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<td>*</td>
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* p < .05  ** p < .01  *** p < .001
Zero-order correlation matrix of study variables.

* p < .05, ** p < .01, p < .001. Two-tailed tests. Cronbach’s Apha reliability coefficients are reported on the horizontal.
We first conducted an analysis of the measurement model (Stage 1) to specify the relationship between latent variables and observed variables. Next, we computed the structural model (Stage 2) that specifies the relationships among latent variables. The two stage measurement structural model procedure was used because it separates measurement issues from model structure issues (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In order to assess goodness-of-fit, GFI, NFI, CFI, and RMSEA were used. GFI, like a chi-square, provides a measure of the extent to which the covariance matrix estimated by the hypothesized model reproduces the observed covariance matrix (James, Muliak, & Brett, 1982). NFI assesses a model’s fit in relation to the worst and best fit attainable rather than as a sole function of the difference between the reproduced and observed covariance matrices (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980). CFI has similar attributes but also accounts for population parameters. In addition to CFI, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was assessed as a noncentrality parameter.

The correlation matrix between study variables is in Table 1. In support of hypothesis 1, LMX quality was positively associated with (a) skill variety, (b) task identity, and (c) task significance (r = .27, .19, .27; p < .001 in all cases). Consistent with hypothesis 2, LMX quality was positively associated with job autonomy (r = .39, p < .001). Lastly, consistent with hypothesis 3, LMX quality was positively associated with feedback (r = .46, p < .001). None of these correlations were greater than .6, thereby indicating discriminant validity of the constructs.

**Measurement Model (Stage 1)**

A measurement model for the latent constructs showed acceptable fit to the data (GFI = .88, NFI = .95, CFI=.98, and RMSEA = .05). All indicators of the latent variables were mean centered and we used summed indicators rather than averaged indicators, because averaging reduces the magnitude of interaction variances in the input covariance matrix, and thus its determinant. Parameter estimates (factor loadings) of the 10-factor model were all significant (p < .05) and ranged from .41 to .78. These results affirmed the convergent validity of the model.

A supplemental analysis was conducted to assess the degree to which common method variance may have inflated some of the relationships between study variables (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Harman’s one-factor test was conducted following the recommendations of Podsakoff and Organ (1986). The use of this procedure is based on the logic that if common method variance exists, the first unrotated factor extracted from a factor analysis containing all items of interest should account for a large proportion of total variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

An exploratory factor analysis using a maximum likelihood solution was conducted on all of the items comprising study constructs. Results of this analysis showed that 10 factors emerged with Eigenvalues larger than 1.00, suggesting that more than one factor underlies the data. Moreover, the first factor accounted for only 17.15% of the total variance. The finding that less than 20% of the total variance was explained by the first factor suggests that common method variance may not be a serious concern in the present study (Eby & Dobbins, 1997).

**Structural Models (Stage 2)**
We examined a model incorporating the totality of study variables. We began with a model based on full mediation (see Figure 1). The model resulted in poor model fit (GFI = .79, NFI = .78, CFI = .79, RMSEA = .19 and $\chi^2(32) = 499.24$ ($p < .001$). However, all hypothesized paths were significant at $p < .001$ and 20% of the variance in affective commitment was explained.

Next, we examined partial mediation. This analysis resulted in a model of acceptable fit; GFI = .96, NFI = .97, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, and a $\chi^2(26) = 40.15$ ($p = .001$) after error variances between psychological states were set free and paths were added directly from (a) LMX to affective commitment, (b) task identity and affective commitment and (c) feedback and affective commitment. This model is in Figure 1. In support of hypothesis 4, Figure 1 shows that LMX quality and experienced meaningfulness of work were positively related with the relationship fully mediated by skill variety, task identity and task significance. Thus hypotheses 4 a, b, and c (respectively) were supported. LMX quality and experienced responsibility for outcomes were also positively related with the relationship fully mediated by autonomy, per hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 6, stated that LMX quality and experienced knowledge of results will be positively related with the relationship mediated by feedback. This hypothesis was also supported.

Consistent with hypothesis 7, we found (a) skill variety, (b) task identity and (c) task significance were positively related to affective commitment with the relationship mediated by experienced meaningfulness of work. However, for skill variety there was partial mediation. Autonomy was positively related to affective commitment with the relationship fully mediated by experienced responsibility for outcomes. Thus, hypothesis 8 was supported. Also, consistent with hypothesis 9, feedback was positively related to affective commitment with the relationship partially mediated by knowledge of results. Lastly, there was support for a direct link between LMX and affective commitment.

Discussion

The current study explores the mechanism by which high quality LMX exchanges may influence employee affective commitment. Our findings extend the existing literature on LMX theory by examining how the quality of such exchanges between subordinates and supervisors may impact employee psychological states (experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of results), through job enrichment characteristics as proposed by the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldman, 1976). Research has begun to examine relationships between LMX and co-worker social exchange relationships (CWX; see Uhl-Bien et al., 2000), but no
research, to our knowledge, has examined how high quality LMX relationships can impact the development of affective commitment. Given that affective commitment has been found to be positively associated with desirable organizational outcomes, such as reduced turnover, and improved performance (Meyer and Allen, 1997), we attempted to highlight the processes through which organizations can create conditions suitable to the development of affective commitment in employees.

Our findings provide support for the social exchange process inherent in the LMX model of leadership (Blau, 1964). That is, leaders may offer increased job latitude and delegate responsibilities of greater significance, while the follower may reciprocate by putting in greater levels of effort and job performance. Hence, leaders can provide followers with increasingly enriched work roles in exchange for followers fulfilling ever-increasing expectations of exemplary job performance within more broadly defined roles (Graen, 2003).

In addition, we found that LMX quality and experienced meaningfulness of work were positively related, with this relationship fully mediated by skill variety, task identity and task significance. These results build on the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldman, 1976). As LMX increases in quality, leaders may assign more challenging tasks to followers that require the use of different skill sets (skill variety), entrusting them with whole projects (task identity), and delegating responsibilities of greater importance (task significance) (Cordery & Wall, 1985; Liden et al., 1997). Consistent with the predictions of the Job Characteristics Model, (Hackman & Oldman, 1976), such job enrichment techniques enhance experienced meaningfulness of work for employees.

The present results indicated that LMX quality and experienced responsibility for outcomes were also positively related with the relationship fully mediated by autonomy. Similarly, LMX quality and experienced knowledge of results were positively related with the relationship mediated by feedback. These findings are consistent with depictions of member performance and leader delegation as reciprocal influences (Blau, 1964; Bauer & Green, 1996). Leaders in high quality relationships will provide followers with feedback regarding their performance. When feedback is understood, accepted and acted upon, it enhances both performance and motivation (Latham & Wexley, 1981).

We found that (a) skill variety, (b) task identity and (c) task significance were positively related to affective commitment with the relationship mediated by experienced meaningfulness of work. However, for skill variety, there was partial mediation. These findings build on those of others (Mowday et al., 1982) who found that certain types of work experiences (i.e., job challenge) are associated with affective commitment.
Results also suggested that autonomy and feedback were positively related to affective commitment with the relationships fully mediated by experienced responsibility for outcomes and knowledge of results, respectively. Our results are consistent with the predictions of the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), which proposes that jobs with autonomy enhance experienced responsibility for outcomes, enhancing the motivating potential of the job and contributing to the positive work attitudes. Our findings are also consistent with research demonstrating that higher levels of decision making authority promote feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Consistent with hypothesis 9, task feedback is likely to enhance cognitive assessments of impact, by providing information about the quality and effectiveness of performance (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrow, 2000).

Lastly, there was support for a direct link between LMX and affective commitment. This finding suggests that the quality of the exchange between leader and follower may have a direct link to the development of affective commitment in employees, consistent with the reciprocity norm inherent in the social exchange process (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theorists have conceptualized the employment relationship as a trade of effort and loyalty for tangible benefits and rewards (Etzioni, 1961). Employees form global perceptions of the degree to which supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being, and reciprocate in high quality LMX relationships by being affectively motivated to engage in tasks and duties that extend beyond the formal work contract.

**Practical Implications**

Research suggests that employees who are affectively committed to their organizations exhibit heightened performance, reduced absenteeism, and a reduced likelihood of quitting their jobs (Mathew & Zajac, 1990; Allen & Meyer, 1997; Mowday & Steers, 1982). Hence, the development of affective commitment is of primary concern to employers (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Our findings illustrate the importance of encouraging the development of high quality exchanges between leaders and followers, to facilitate the development of affective commitment in employees. Employees who are intrinsically motivated are likely to exert efforts to work towards the success of the organization. Organizations wishing to obtain affective commitment should ensure that they provide a climate that is conducive to the development of high quality exchanges between employees and their supervisors.

**Limitations**
A limitation to this study is the cross-sectional design which prevents us from making causal statements. However, the results presented here have high external validity and should serve to encourage the development of carefully designed experimental studies to establish causality.

Another potential limitation is that the duration of respondents’ LMX relationship was not measured. Accordingly, we were unable to test whether relationship duration moderates the associations we found. As such, our results speak to the magnitude of relationships averaged across different durations of the LMX relationship.

References


