

Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

Leader-member exchange and belongingness: The role of gender dissimilarity in leaders' and members' citizenship behaviors

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Decades of research point to the beneficial effects of leader-member exchange (LMX) for employee work outcomes. However, consensus is growing that LMX research should also incorporate the leader's perspective in order to fully capture the relational or dyadic nature of LMX. Studies of dyadic gender similarity also tend to share this shortcoming of focusing only on employee outcomes. We integrate and extend the LMX and gender similarity literatures by drawing from belongingness and social exchange theories to examine the effects of both leaders' and followers' belongingness at work – captured in LMX affect – on their citizenship behaviors through felt obligation toward each other, and whether this process depends on gender (dis)similarity. Moderated mediated actor-partner interdependence modeling with data from 139 matched leader-follower dyads revealed that leaders' and followers' LMX affect was positively related to their felt obligation toward each other. In addition, we found a second-stage conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity, such that the relationship between followers' LMX affect and OCB-I through their felt obligation was significant only in dissimilar-gender dyads. Supplemental analyses revealed a similar conditional indirect effect for leaders, but for the outcome of OCB-O. These findings challenge the assumption that dyadic gender similarity always leads to better outcomes and instead suggests dissimilar-gender LMX dyads might go above and beyond at work to maintain their belongingness bond.