Research

International Journal of
Business Communication
1–23

DOI: 10.1177/2329488419871677
journals.sagepub.com/home/job
SAGE

Relative Leader-Member Exchange Within Work Groups: The Mediating Effect of Leader-Member Conversation Quality on Group-Focused Citizenship Behavior

Hassan Abu Bakar[1] and Stacey L. Connaughton[2]

Abstract

We introduce a multilevel model that examines how and when relative leader-member exchange (RLMX) within the work group associates with group members' commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. Results of the study are based on data gathered from a sample of 155 leader-member dyads within 25 work groups in a Malaysian organization and provide support for the hypotheses. Specifically, the results obtained from the analysis of a hierarchical linear modeling showed that leader-member conversation quality mediates the relationship between RLMX and group-focused citizenship behavior. The findings suggest that the relative group members' ratings of leader-member exchange have the ability to influence the quality of leader-member conversation and that this positive relationship of RLMX on group-focused citizenship behavior is contingent on the direct and indirect effect of leader-member conversation quality.

Keywords

relative leader-member exchange, leader-member conversation quality, organizational citizenship behavior, groups, multilevel analysis

[1]Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia
[2]Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, USA

Corresponding Author:
Hassan Abu Bakar, School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah 06010, Malaysia.
Email: abhassan@uum.edu.my

Leader-member exchange (LMX) has proven to be a rich approach to examining leadership (see Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Prior LMX research, however, has largely ignored the fact that relationship development in a leader-member dyad is often about how leaders and members *perceive* their embedded relationships within the context of the work group itself and in the organization as a whole (Hu & Liden, 2013). Indeed, there remains a paucity of LMX contextual research in the communication discipline, which considers the dynamic interplay between leader-member relationships and communication exchange quality that is embedded in a leader-member dyad (see Sheer, 2015). Researchers have recently underscored that interpersonal exchanges between dyads (leader-member and coworkers) in a work group are interconnected and embedded within a larger social network in organizations (Bakar & McCann, 2016; Hu & Liden, 2013; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017).

Given the fact that communication is at the heart of all workplace relationships (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017) and that leader-member dyadic relationships often emerge through social exchange, typified by communicative interactions that emerge during the process of working together in work groups, more LMX research that captures the communicative aspects of that exchange is necessary. In this vein, communication scholars have called for more inquiries into LMX research that address leader-member relationships (relationships and communication quality) through multilevel analysis within the context of work groups (Liao, Liu, & Loi, 2010; Seibold, Hollingshead, & Yoon, 2014). Two particular aspects of LMX relationships have yet to be tested explicitly: (a) the effect of LMX scores assessment across members on group members' behavior and (b) the underlying communication process involved within leader-member dyads (e.g., Lam, Peng, Wong, & Lau, 2017; Omilion-Hodges, Ptacek, & Zerilli, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to respond to the above calls and empirical voids by examining LMX within the greater work group context. We do so in part by exploring one key extension of LMX—relative LMX (RLMX)—which refers to the actual level of one's own LMX as compared to the average of all LMX within the group (Hu & Liden, 2013; Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012). Indeed, as a result of a continuous series of interactions within the work group, the leader-member dyadic relationship quality in any one dyad cannot be seen as isolated from those of other dyads in the work group. Within a particular work group, for example, there may be considerable variance in the communication between the group leader and different group members. Such an examination helps us move toward a more nuanced and thorough understanding of leader-member relationships.

Previous studies have demonstrated that an individual's perception of his or her relationship quality with the leader can have a positive impact on individual outcomes such as commitment, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and job satisfaction (Dulebohn et al., 2012). The effects of these impacts can go beyond the effects of LMX alone (Harris, Li, & Kirkman, 2014). However, our knowledge of the impact of RLMX at multiple levels of analysis is still far from complete (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016). The nature of leader-member communication in work groups has not been

made theoretically explicit nor has it been empirically tested in a systematic manner in previous LMX studies. Specifically, little is known about the underlying mechanisms of leader-member communication through which the impacts of individual leader-member relationship dyads within work groups are realized. In this study, we attempt to explore these underlying mechanisms by considering leader-member conversational quality (LMCQ) as a communication process within the work group that explains the effects of RLMX on group member outcomes. This is an important empirical move for a recent meta-analysis has demonstrated that leader-member interaction shows incremental validity above LMX scores for certain outcomes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Banks et al., 2014).

This study contributes to leadership and communication literature in two major ways. First, this research aims to further develop the extant LMX-group behavior framework (Herdman, Yang, & Arthur, 2017). We achieve this by utilizing multilevel analysis with regard to LMX, as well as clarifying and underscoring the critical role of LMCQ in linking both the RLMX and the perceived OCB as it manifests in work group. Second, this study paves the way for more fine-grained theorizing and multilevel analysis of the relationship between RLMX and LMCQ vis-à-vis group outcomes in organizations. Each of these points will be discussed in greater detail below.

Theoretical Background

Relative Leader-Member Exchange

The LMX framework suggests that leaders develop different dyadic relationships with their members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Empirical research has shown that differentiated LMX relationships between a given manager and his or her subordinates exist in groups (Bakar & Sheer, 2013; Bakar, Jian, & Fairhurst, 2014; Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015), which implies that the LMX of individuals is interpreted relative to the LMX relationships of other group members within the work group (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014; Schriesheim, Wu, & Cooper, 2011; Zhou & Schriesheim, 2009). The idea of the relative leader-member construct stems from social comparison theory, which posits that individuals are likely to compare themselves to others in organizations, especially those within their immediate work group (Hu & Liden, 2013). Social comparison postulates that people are concerned with the way they stack up against similar others, especially with their groupmates, and that those comparisons help them understand their unique capabilities and skills, individual task performance, and levels of acceptance and respect within the reference group (Tse et al., 2013). In addition, members within a work group are typically exposed to one shared positional leader and the same or similar group activities on a daily basis; for this reason, they are more likely to compare themselves to their groupmates when forming self-evaluations (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010; Greenberg, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2007). Therefore, the degree to which an individual group member's LMX score differs from the average LMX of other coworkers in the work group can serve as part of a process of evaluation and comparison within work groups. To put it simply, the evaluations and comparisons

elucidate the shared social reality within the context of work groups (Landry, Vandenberghe, & Ayed, 2014).

The concept of RLMX is distinct from LMX, as RLMX mainly focuses on assessing a group member's LMX relative standing in terms of their exchange relationships with the leader. Whereas LMX measures the quality of relationships between leaders and their members (Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski, & Chaudhry, 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013; Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010), RLMX reflects the degree to which an individual's LMX differs from the average LMX of other coworkers in a work group. It is also worth noting that RLMX differs from the newly developed LMX construct called LMX social comparison (LMXSC; Vidyarthi et al., 2010). LMXSC focuses only on subjective comparison evaluation of an individual LMX and of coworkers based on perceptual ratings directly from focal employees (see Vidyarthi et al., 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that RLMX is associated with important work outcomes beyond those associated with LMX. For example, after controlling for the individuals' perceptions of LMX, RLMX is reported to be positively related to job satisfaction, job performance, and OCB (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013; Hu & Liden, 2013).

Although these findings demonstrate that RLMX is a unique construct, to our knowledge, RLMX has not been tested within the context of leader-member communication within work groups. Recent work shows that LMXSC partially mediated the relationship between RLMX and job performance (see Li, Feng, Liu, & Cheng, 2014). Thomas, Martin, Epitropaki, Guillaume, and Lee (2013) indicate that the underlying mechanism of RLMX's association with employees' outcomes is likely related to other social activities such as communication and interaction between a leader and work group members. Unfortunately, to date, leader-member communication remains a background element in LMX literature as opposed to being the primary process in LMX development. To be sure, communication scholars Omilion-Hodges and Baker (2017) and Baker and Omilion-Hodges (2013) have addressed the LMX differentiation score based on the absolute value of the difference in participant LMX scores and their referent coworkers. This approach is useful in describing the dyadic effect of LMX yet it largely ignores the embedded group effects on dyadic relationships. We expect that RLMX can explain meaningful variance in group members' behavior via leader-member conversation quality (LMCQ).

Leader-Member Conversation Quality

The communication aspects of leader-member relationships have been the subject of study, theoretically and empirically, by communication scholars (e.g., Baker & Omilion-Hodges, 2013; Sias, 2005). Nonetheless, limited evidence exists with regard to leader-member relationships and the vital role that communication within work groups plays in relation to work group outcomes (Seibold et al., 2014). In fact, within the work group, the dynamics of leader-member communication have not been treated at the dyadic level of analysis, although interest in multilevel analysis among organizational scholars in general is evident (e.g., Miller et al., 2011).

Within the LMX research framework, there are three communication categories central to LMX relationships. One line of LMX communication research focuses on communication as an upward influence strategy and LMX relationship maintenance with the notion that LMX relationships have differing qualities (see Olufowote, Miller, & Wilson, 2005). Another line of inquiry focuses on the communication patterns across different levels of LMX relationships, suggesting that leader-member interaction is considered vital to the different qualities of leader-member relationships (see Fix & Sias, 2006). A third line of research has focused on the quality and the amount of communication with regard to LMX relationships (Jian, 2014). This line of investigation revealed a strong and positive association between LMX and information in terms of the quality and quantity of information (see Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014, for a review). Taken together, these findings indicate that the relationship between communication and LMX has been investigated from many different angles; however, the underlying processes of leader-member conversation in a work group are not fully understood (Seibold et al., 2014) and are yet to be tested systematically (Jian, Shi, & Dalisay, 2014).

The key assumption of workplace leader-member conversation is rooted within the relational dyadic communication perspective, which indicates that communication is a negotiated process through which members of a dyad reciprocally define the relationship. Based on this notion, Barry and Crant (2000) described dyadic communication from the perspective of interaction richness theory; rich conversations within a dyad are characterized as those in which meaning(s) can be conveyed with a few words, interactional movements are highly synchronized, and intended meanings are precisely conveyed. In addition, previous communication scholars works have also identified several dyadic relationship patterns within the context of interpersonal communication such as openness in communication (Jablin, 1979), direction of information flow in dyadic relationships (Katz & Kahn, 1978), source credibility (Burgoon & Hale, 1984), attraction (Bell, Tremblay, & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987; Berger, Weber, Munley, & Dixon, 1977), similarity (Eisenberg, Monge, & Farace, 1984), and impression management (Waldron, 1991).

The current study extends this notion by arguing that interaction richness theory is crucial for understanding the extent to which symbolic meaning is shared in dyadic interactions and that the interpretation of this meaning is likely to be determined by both the leader and the member's expectations. In essence, LMCQ within a work group should have significant implications for positive organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment. In this study, LMCQ refers to the richness of conversation in a leader-member dyad in the context of accomplishing work tasks (Jian & Dalisay, 2017). Leader-member dyads who have high-quality interaction are likely to ease communication expectations and engage more in similar information exchange within activities (Kleinbaum, Stuart, & Tushman, 2013), thus making collaboration between leader-member dyads in the work group smoother (Walker & Stohl, 2012). In the Malaysian workplace context, high-level communication quality between the leader-member dyad may be an especially important goal (Bakar & McCann, 2018). In this regard, high-quality communication implies a strong relationship commitment,

the extent to which communication exchange behaviors between a group leader and group members leads to the joint achievement of work group goals; this may be a crucial factor in the social relationship development and maintenance of the work group. Thus, in Malaysian workplaces, we argue that leader-member communication quality can be viewed as a manifestation of the socially appropriate interactive exchanges that occur between leaders and members.

Group-Focused Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB has been described as the "performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place" (Organ, 1997, p. 95; see also Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Specifically, OCB occurs when members have a good understanding of their job objectives, connect to the group's collective tasks, and cooperate with other group members to achieve group effectiveness. Group effectiveness may be accomplished by group members engaging in OCBs such as helping co-workers perform tasks and making suggestions to fellow group members in order to improve performance (Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Maynes, & Spoelma, 2014; Harris et al., 2014). These types of individual behaviors in the work group, in turn, become a standard mode of group behavior (Whitman, Van Rooy, & Viswesvaran, 2010). Since the degree of OCB can act as one measure of the effectiveness of a work group, in this study we treat OCB as an outcome as well. By utilizing a communication-centered approach, we propose a multilevel model to examine the intricate relationships among LMXs and LMCQ in the workplace.

Theory and Hypotheses

Leader-Member Exchange and Leader-Member Conversation

Researchers exploring LMX often assume that followers in different LMX conditions, such as high- or low-quality dyads, communicate differently and that these differences shape the perceptions of each party. As explained earlier, within the LMX research framework, there are three communication-centered lines of inquiry (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). While these three areas of inquiry clearly support the fundamental role of LMX in communication research, our understandings of the underlying processes of leader-member conversation based on RLMX in groups remain partial at best. Expanding on the notion of social comparison theory in an LMX framework, Sias and Jablin (1995) found that each member of the work group is aware of differential treatment and, in fact, talks about it. More recently, through a series of focus groups with managers and members, Omilion-Hodges and Baker (2017) have found that the relationship an employee has with their leader can influence the degree of communication within the dyad. For example, members of a work group affected by differential treatment by their leader who talk about it, can create and reinforce social perceptions of such differential treatment within the group (Bryant & Sias, 2011; Sias, 2005), which

implies that leader-member conversation is relative to the perceived differentiation of leader-member treatment (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012).

There are at least two reasons why RLMX and LMCQ occur in the work group. First, as many communication studies of LMX indicate, LMX quality is associated with different communication patterns between leaders and members (see Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). This suggests that different levels of leader-member dyadic relationships cause different communication content and styles (Jian & Dalisay, 2017; Sias, Pedersen, Gallagher, & Kopaneva, 2012). The results suggest LMX influences other group members' communication perspectives and the overall relationship stability within the group. In fact, research has found that large discrepancies in leader-member relationship quality are associated with a decrease in employees' well-being (Hooper & Martin, 2008). Second, the dyadic communication perspective is at the heart of all relational dynamics (Barry & Crant, 2000; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The leader-member dyadic and relational communication reflect effective shared meaning of relationship interpretations (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). As indicated earlier, RLMX provides individual group members with information pertaining to their status within the group (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). Therefore, when a group member's level of LMX is higher than the average level of LMX within the group, one is likely to have a rich conversation in a leader-member dyad especially in the context of accomplishing work tasks. Accordingly, the RLMX across leader-member dyads is likely to have significant implications for LMCQ. Thus, the following hypothesis is forwarded:

Hypothesis 1: RLMX is positively related to LMCQ.

Leader-Member Conversation and Group-Focused OCB

Researchers have demonstrated that employees' perceptions of LMX quality and leader-member communication quality have positive impacts on individual outcomes such as affective commitment to the work group (Bakar, Dilbeck, & McCroskey, 2010), organizational commitment Jian & Dalisay, 2017), and job satisfaction (Fix & Sias, 2006; Sias et al., 2012). As mentioned earlier group members' perceptions of LMX and conversation quality are associated with positive emotions and attitudes toward their jobs (see Hu & Liden, 2013; Jian & Dalisay, 2017). Additionally, research has demonstrated that high LMX group members receive more quality work-related information from their leaders (Fix & Sias, 2006), which can contribute to these group members' positive attitudes. We build on this argument by taking into account that group members' OCBs are at their optimal level when group members perceive the LMCQ with group leaders to be of high quality. Communication research also suggests effective leader-member communication can help organizational members achieve job satisfaction and be more fully committed to their organization (see Bakar et al., 2010). In fact, Sias (2005) showed that the communication quality that a subordinate received from a manager was a better predictor of subordinates' job satisfaction and commitment than LMX, when these two variables were analyzed together. As

noted by Sias (2005) the quality of communication between group members and their group leader served to create and reinforce social perceptions about differential treatment within the work group. It has also been shown that the quality of communication between leader and member directly drives and reinforces subordinates' perceptions of their respective work group relationship (Bakar & Sheer, 2013; Baker & Omilion-Hodges, 2013). We, therefore, hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: LMCQ is positively related to group members' OCB.

The Mediating Role of LMCQ

Based on the notion of LMX and relational dyadic communication, it is likely that RLMX and LMCQ will affect work behaviors and attitudes. Concisely, the leader-member conversation can be enhanced by the underlying mechanisms of RLMX through (a) high shared meaning and exchange between leader-member dyad, (b) highly synchronized interactional movements between the leader-member dyad, and (c) precisely conveyed intended meanings by dyad members. The presence of these three types of communication allows the development of group members' confidence and promotes a sense of belonging within the group as manifested in their OCB.

The perception of conversation quality between leader-member dyads in the work group is likely to affect group members' efforts to pursue engagement at the highest levels (i.e., commitment and showing more OCB). In fact, a previous study provides empirical evidence that the impact of LMCQ on commitment is higher than that of LMX when pooled together in the regression (see Jian & Dalisay, 2017), suggesting the likely mediating effect of LMCQ. Therefore, when the level of LMX of a group member is higher than the average of LMX within the work group, he or she is more likely to have rich conversation in a leader-member dyad especially in the instances of work linking task accomplishment; such situations will have direct and indirect impact on group member's OCB. However, as mentioned earlier, previous research has yet to test the effect of RLMX, in particular from the RLMX on LMCQ. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: LMCQ mediates the relationships between RLMX and OCB.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Data for this study were obtained from the headquarters of a power supply company in Malaysia. This company's divisions are organized into 38 work groups with 38 group leaders and 258 employees, all of whom were invited to participate. Employees were from different functional areas such as corporate planning, marketing, research and development, customer services, human resources, corporate communication, procurement and tendering, and finance. Each group is supervised and monitored by

a leader, each of whom has common roles to that of the other group leaders. Preliminary conversations revealed that leaders share common group goals, have stable group memberships (minimum group tenure is 6 months), and that group members are highly task interdependent. For instance, the common goal for R&D groups at the company is to produce and conduct feasibility studies that primarily focus on new sources of energy; in addition, team members may also be assigned to different tasks in doing environmental impact analysis, participating in public awareness programs, and designing a new power supply plant. Furthermore, the participating teams can be considered as traditional groups as all members of each work group are working in the same physical environment and have frequent face-to-face interactions on a daily basis.

The specification of individual behavior in organizations based on an appropriate composition model is essential for organizational multilevel research. Composition models define the relationships among variables at different levels of analyses that fundamentally examine the same content but which are different in quality (Mathieu & Chen, 2011). This study has employed the referent-shift consensus composition model because our interest is in individual aggregate scores. The group OCB was specifically designed for the purpose of this referent shift, with the collective entity being the focal point. However, the outcomes of variables of previous studies were mostly obtained from the same sources (employees), which may introduce method bias. Therefore, we chose instead to obtain data of OCB from group leaders, thus reducing the threat of common method variance (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012).

The data collection for this study took place in three stages. Collecting data at three time points in time was done to minimize common method bias and is a widely used practice in LMX research (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). At Time 1 and Time 2, group members received a questionnaire along with a cover letter introducing the survey. They were asked to return the questionnaire through the organization's internal mailing system. Each questionnaire was coded with an identification number to match group members' responses with their immediate group leader's evaluations. At Time 3, group leaders (formal middle level managers) received a questionnaire that evaluated the OCB of their respective group members.

The timing of the data collection was as follows: At Time 1, group members were asked to rate the quality of their LMX. A total of 51 group leaders and 556 questionnaires were distributed. 242 group members responded to the Time 1 survey. At Time 2 (2 months later), we distributed a questionnaire to the 242 group members who responded to the Time 1 survey, which measured group members' perceptions of their LMCQ with their group leader. A total of 230 group members responded. Finally, at Time 3 (1 month later), we provided a questionnaire that measured the individual leaders' perceptions of each group member's OCB. In this occasion, 25 group leaders' responses were matched with those of 155 group members. This approach is consistent with work by Podsakoff et al. (2014), who recommend that to minimize common method bias, researchers can use a series of surveys and different data sources.

The final average response rate for the 25 work groups was 97.14%, which is greater than the 60% response rate Timmerman (2005) has recommended. The group

sizes ranged from 5 to 8 members, with a mean of 6.8 members. In the group leader sample, 51.7% were women, the mean age was 38.20 years (standard deviation [*SD*] = 4.31), and the mean group tenure was 5.78 years (*SD* = 3.66). In the group member sample, 54.2% were men, the mean age was 36.72 years (*SD* = 3.35), organizational tenure was 6.63 years (*SD* = 3.92), group tenure was 3.43 years (*SD* = 2.80), and dyadic tenure was 2.53 years (*SD* = 1.71). We also conducted a *t* test on key demographic variables between useable questionnaires and unusable questionnaires including sex ($t = 0.78$, $p > .05$), ethnicity ($t = 0.98$, $p > .05$), and their ratings of main study variables include LMX ($t = 0.49$, $p > .05$), LMCQ ($t = 1.19$, $p > .05$), and OCB ($t = 0.88$, $p > .05$). Results of these *t* tests suggest that our findings are not biased by the missing group members and groups.

Measures

Group member and group leader responses were all measured by using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Leader-Member Exchange. We measured LMX with the widely used multidimensional LMX of Liden and Maslyn (1998). The 12-item scale measuring group members' perspective, also known as LMX-MDM (LMX–multidimensional measure), was used. An example item from this scale is "My group leader is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend." Coefficient alpha for the group member rating is .85.

Relative Leader-Member Exchange. We followed the operationalization outlined by Henderson et al. (2008), Vidyarthi et al. (2010), and Hu and Liden (2013) to assess RLMX. Thus, we subtracted the mean LMX-MDM score within a group from each group member's composite LMX-MDM score (see Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). We are aware of Edwards and Parry's (1993) suggestion to use polynomial regression for the differences score; however, the Edwards and Parry (1993) critique is based on the difference scores between two perceptual variables. This is not an issue for the current study when simply subtracting the mean from each individual LMX score on a single variable, which is what is done to calculate RLMX.

Leader-Member Conversation Quality. We measured LMCQ with the scale developed by Jian et al. (2014). The nine-item scale measuring the group members' perspective, also known as LMCQ, was used. An example item from this scale is "With regard to getting things done, the conversations between my group leader and I are efficient." Coefficient alpha for the group member rating is .90.

Perceived Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Group leaders assessed group members' OCB via six items adopted from the work of Smith, Organ, and Near (1983). An example item for this measure is: "This group member helps other group members who have heavy workloads." The Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Control Variables. We controlled for organizational tenure due to the potential influences of perception on organizational culture (Grant, 2012). We also controlled for average group tenure, because time working together may be positively related to group effectiveness (Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012). Finally, group size was also controlled for, because it is likely for larger groups to have a pool of cognitive resources that will enable the group to reach a high level of group performance (Shin, Kim, Lee, & Bian, 2012).

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to determine the distinctiveness of the measures: LMX-MDM (group member), LMCQ (group member), and OCB (group leader). A hypothesized three-factor model with distinct correlated factors for LMX-MDM (group member), LMCQ (group member), and OCB (Model 1) was compared to two alternative models: (a) a two-factor model, in which LMX-MDM (group member) and OCB were loaded on a common factor (Model 2) and (b) a one-factor model in which all items were loaded on a single factor (Model 3). The results indicated that the hypothesized three-factor model, with LMX-MDM (group member), LMCQ (group member), and OCB items loading on unique factors, produced a good and better fit than the alternative models: $\chi^2(48, N = 155) = 335.20, p < .01$, comparative fit index = .98, normed fit index = .97, standardized root mean square residual = .06, and root mean square error for approximation = .09. All items loaded significantly on their respective factors.

Given that all of our analyses were cross-level in nature, we needed to establish that the variables at the individual level could be aggregated. Also, we needed to determine whether it was necessary to control the group effects. In order to do so, we first calculated two forms of intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC). ICC(1) represented the proportion of variance attributable to group variability and ICC(2) reflected the extent to which groups were used to differentiate reliably in terms of the individuals' rating of the variables. As a next step, we drew on the research by Bliese (2000) who suggested that ICC(1) values close to .20 indicate that the scores are desirable for group-level analysis. For ICC(2), values greater than .60 were desirable. Our ICC(1) and ICC(2) values calculated via analysis of variance were .20 and .86 for LMX-MDM, .18 and .82 for LMCQ, and .21 and .89 for group-level OCB. The results suggested that the individual-level variables could be aggregated, that a cross-level analysis was appropriate, and that hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) techniques were necessary to test our hypothesis (see Tasa, Taggar, & Seijts, 2007). Data in this study were tested for entry errors and normality (based on kurtosis and skewedness) of the distribution of each item and the composite score of each variable. The majority of the items appeared within normal ranges.

Analysis

We tested our hypotheses via HLM. HLM is a stringent, appropriate, and efficient procedure for our study in that it allows for (a) simultaneous analyses of multi- and cross-level data (e.g., nested structure), which minimizes possible biases (e.g., employees' one-sided ratings of LMCQ), (b) supports mediation tests, and (c) identifies

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. LMX-MDM	4.87	0.93	—		
2. LMCQ	5.32	0.89	.28**	—	
3. OCB	4.92	0.98	.48**	.53**	—

Note. LMX = leader-member exchange; MDM = multidimensional measure; LMCQ = leader-member conversation quality; OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. $N = 155$ individual leader-member dyads; $N = 25$ groups.
**$p < .05$.

sources of variance, thus reducing measurement error (see Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2004).

Because our sample consisted of dyads in work groups with each manager (leader) rating multiple subordinates in a work group, group leaders' ratings on group-level OCB might not have been independent. HLM can detect leader effects while also testing our mediation hypothesis. Thus, we estimated a multilevel model where group members (Level 1) were nested within the group leaders (Level 2). We followed Preacher and Hayes's (2008) and Hayes's (2009) approach to assessing mediation to determine whether LMCQ mediated the relationship of RLMX and group-level OCB.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables. The HLM analysis results are reported in Table 2. To test the hypotheses, we first entered the control variables mean group tenure, group size, and organizational tenure. In the second step, we entered the control variable of individual perceptions of LMX. For the third step, the main X-Y model was tested, and finally, the X-M and M-Y models were tested simultaneously. Table 2 reports the results relating to Hypotheses 1 to 3.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that RLMX is positively related to LMCQ. This indicates that the greater the RLMX perceptions of LMX-MDM, the higher an employee's perceptions of the conversation quality with his or her group leader. To test Hypothesis 1, we examined the positive association between RLMX and LMCQ. Results in Table 2 show that RLMX was positively related to LMCQ ($\beta = .20, p < .05$), after controlling for individuals' perceptions of LMX. Hence, Hypothesis 1 received support. Next we tested Hypotheses 2 and 3, where we are expected to find a main effect of LMCQ on OCB and that LMCQ would mediate the relationship between RLMX and OCB. Based on Preacher and Hayes (2008), we used bootstrap confidence intervals to test our mediation hypothesis because they are bias-corrected. Results showed a significant indirect effect between RLMX and OCB ($\beta = .24, p < .05$). A one-tailed Sobel test also supported the significance of this indirect effect ($z = 3.68, p < .01$), as did bootstrap results showing that 95% bias-corrected confidence interval [.08, .27] did not contain zero. Hence Hypotheses 2 and 3 received support, as LMCQ not only had a direct impact on OCB, but also mediated the relationship between RLMX and OCB.

Table 2. Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results of Leader-Member Conversation Quality as a Mediator.

Null model	Coefficient	χ^2	
Group-level OCBτ_{000}	.006*	163.35	
	Total effects		Fixed effects
	X-Y	X-M	M-Y
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Dependent variables	Y: Group-level OCB	M: Leader-member conversation quality	Y: Group-level OCB
Step 1: Control variables			
Average group tenure	.05 (.08)	.00 (.00)	.07 (.10)
Group size	.03 (.05)	.02 (.09)	.03 (.03)
Organizational tenure	.12 (.08)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Step 2: Control for LMX			
Individual's perceptions of LMX	.42**	.38**	.27**
Step 3: Main effect			
RLMX	.24**	.20**	.06
Step 4: Mediator			
LMCQ			.38**
R^2			.42
Pseudo R^2	.28	.33	.38
Log-likelihood	14	16	20
AIC	443.25	452.17	455.34
BIC	295.01	309.22	310.54

Note. $N = 155$; OCB = organizational citizenship behavior; LMX = leader-member exchange; RLMX = relative leader-member exchange; LMCQ = leader-member conversation quality; AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported (standard error in parentheses).
*$p < .01$. **$p < .05$.

In sum, the data provide support for our hypotheses. The results suggest that (a) RLMX within the group is related to the group members' OCB as perceived and reported by leaders and (b) LMCQ as rated by group members mediates the relationship between RLMX and group members' OCB as perceived and reported by leaders.

Discussion

Integrating conversation richness theories with the literature on LMX within a work group context, we tested a multilevel model to link RLMX with group members' OCB as perceived and reported by leaders. The key contribution of this study relates to the relationships between RLMX within the group and individual group members'

outcomes via LMCQ. The study's findings offer theoretical contributions for research on LMX and dyadic interactions and for research on LMX more broadly.

Theoretical Implications

The study extends the emerging research on multilevel LMX by exploring RLMX and the underlying mechanisms through which LMCQ affects group members' OCB as perceived by their group leader. By using multilevel analyses, results support the hypothesis that RLMX affects group OCB through the mediating role of leader-member conversation quality. This finding fits well with the dyadic model, suggesting that when relative group member's level of LMX is higher than the average of LMX within the group, that leader-member dyad will be more likely to enjoy more conversation opportunities and more exchange of information or ideas. Therefore, when leader-member conversation and interaction directly and indirectly enhance the dyad relationship within the work group, high relative leader-member dyadic relationships should occur and subsequently lead to a more desired behavior toward the work group such as OCB (Jian & Dalisay, 2017).

What stands out most from this study when compared with previous research is the new perspective of the leader-member conversation quality mechanism within a group in which the RLMX effects on the group member's OCB are important. Previous studies have tended to assume that the communication in work groups is a result of LMX quality (Kunze, De Jong, & Bruch, 2016). However, a more complete look at Barry and Crant's (2000) relational dyadic model implies that the positive value of RLMX on members' OCB as perceived and reported by leaders is contingent on the extent of leader-member conversation quality. Rather than studying LMX in isolation, we examined RLMX and LMCQ as they are naturally embedded within a group context. The cross-level model showed a positive LMCQ association with LMX based on the situation when group members' level of LMX is higher than the average of LMX within the group.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate the mediation of LMCQ (group members' rating) in the relationship between RLMX and OCB as perceived and reported by leaders. These effects are consistent with the relational dyadic model (Barry & Crant, 2000), which suggests that the way in which an individual responds to dyadic relationships depends on how he or she interprets the conversation quality and whether he or she assimilates or contrasts the conversation with his or her role within the work group. In the situation of relative LMX where a group member's level of LMX is higher than the average LMX within the group, leader-member conversation quality induces group member's OCB as perceived and reported by group leaders. Therefore, when group members' and group leaders' LMX are of high quality as compared to the average of LMX within the group, group members with a high-quality conversation with his or her group leader tend to raise the group leader's confidence in their capabilities (Hu & Liden, 2013; Matta et al., 2015).

Notably, the research on RLMX is related to another LMX research stream, LMX differentiation (Hu & Liden, 2013). Both RLMX and LMX differentiation emphasize

the basic assumption of LMX theory that leaders develop differential dyadic relationships with their members. However as mentioned earlier, LMX differentiation and RLMX are two distinctive constructs, in that RLMX captures the variability in LMX relationships across a dyad (both leader and member ratings) in a work group (Matta et al., 2015). Beyond the studies of LMX, the current study contributes to communication research as well as to multilevel leader-member dyad research, by exploring the relationship between RLMX score and leader-member conversation quality in the work group.

In addition, although it is apparent from previous research that conversation or communication has profound effects on social life, particularly in the workplace, a gap remains with regard to the research that integrates RLMX and communication with organizational phenomena (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Thus, along with the contribution to the leadership and communication management literatures, the current study expands our understanding of social and work communication within group contexts. The findings suggest that within group contexts, conversation quality with the common group leaders can become a salient reference for group members' OCB. However, this influence must be interpreted with caution. RLMX serves as a boundary condition when explaining the effects of LMCQ on a group leader's evaluation of a group member's OCB as perceived and reported by leaders. An individual group member who has strong relationship quality with their group leader as compared to other group members is more likely to be recognized, valued, respected, and backed-up by others. These situations can lead to high-quality conversations in the relationships and shape the group leader's perceptions on group member's OCB. This is consistent with the perspective of interaction richness theory, which explains that high-quality conversations within a work group indicates that the conversation's interpretation is likely to be determined by both the leader and the member's expectations in accomplishing work tasks.

Finally, focusing on the construct RLMX has allowed for an examination of the variances of group member's ratings on the LMX quality within work groups. Results of the current investigation also supports the description of Malaysian respondents in prior research (Bakar & McCann, 2016). Previous research noted that Malaysian employees prefer to work as a group rather than individually and place a high value on interpersonal communication and relationships within the group (Bakar & Sheer, 2013). The results of the current investigations indicate that the LMCQ mediates the relationship between RLMX and OCB. Therefore, group members' perceptions of LMX quality would be more important in predicting LMCQ and subsequently group members' OCB as perceived by leaders (Sin, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2009). The results of the mediation analysis of leader-member conversation support this view. One plausible explanation for this mediation phenomenon is that the degree to which an individual's LMX differs from the average LMX of other coworkers in a work group is associated with high-quality conversation. This finding therefore suggests that expectation discrepancies are disadvantageous to conversation quality in work groups. In other words, the degree to which an individual's LMX differs from the average LMX of other coworkers in a work group makes a difference.

Practical Implications

On a practical level, this study's findings show that leaders' perceptions of members and OCB are influenced by RLMX within the work group (Hu & Liden, 2013). The findings from this study provide valuable suggestions for managers in handling their work group. First, if managers can be made aware of and encourage LMX "currency of exchange" (perceived contribution, affect, loyalty, and professional respect; see Liden & Maslyn, 1998) that leads to high RLMX within the work group, they will be better positioned to capitalize on and strengthen members' OCB. Second, if problems are present with the communication in the work group, managers should make attempts to communicate with group members by conveying work information briefly, emphasizing synchronized interactional movements, and precisely conveying the intended meanings. This will have the likelihood to foster leader-member communication conversation quality and subsequently lead to work group effectiveness. When a manager in an organization embraces workplace leader-member conversation quality, he or she may succeed in nurturing and achieving members' OCB as perceived and reported by leaders. Finally, the results of this study have revealed that leader-member relationships alone are inadequate for developing a group member's effectiveness. Clearly, communicative leadership training based on LMCQ characteristics that emphasizes the efficiency of the conversation, coordination in the interaction, and accuracy in conveying information are also necessary to help managers maximize group member's OCB.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

Several methodological strengths increase confidence in the study's results. First, the acquiring of information from multiple sources (group members and group leaders) reduces common method bias (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Second, the integration of the multilevel technique accurately describes the effects of RLMX on group members' outcomes. Furthermore, using the integrated bootstrapping mediation approach (Hayes, 2009) has enabled a better understanding on the overall mechanism of how and when leader-member conversation mediates the relationship between RLMX and group members' OCB as perceived and reported by group leaders. Third, the research studied functional work group contexts, which are characterized by common goals, interdependent work, stable membership, and a common group leader (Cho & Hambrick, 2006). The study also assessed the interdependence of leader-member dyads within a work group, which is important for generating frequent efficiency of the conversation, highly coordinated interaction, and accurate information exchange among dyads in the work group. These facets enabled us to better identify the unique contributions of RLMX and LMCQ on individual outcomes within group contexts.

Despite the above strengths, the cross-sectional design means that one must be cautious about making any conclusions about the causal ordering of the variables in the model. For example, it is possible for group members who are highly committed to the

work group to have performed better to gain a desirable LMX standing within the work group as compared to other group members. Thus, further research is needed to examine how leader-member dyadic relationships and interactions unfold overtime using longitudinal data or experimental research designs. Second, because the findings involved functional work groups, the results of this study are likely to be applied only to a certain level of uniform interdependence and face-to-face interactions within the work group. Third, the generalizability of the findings to other forms of work groups must be done cautiously. It is possible that the dyads and work groups in this sample may not adequately represent the actual dyadic populations in the Malaysian workplace at large. In addition, the current investigation treats RLMX and LMCQ as face-to-face communication within the work group; it is worth exploring the extent to which the RLMX and LMCQ matters and how and when the RLMX would take place in other group settings (i.e., virtual teams) in which interaction channels and computer-mediated communication dependency are different. Finally, the current investigation treats RLMX and LMCQ connection to group member OCB. Hoffman, Blair, Meriac, and Woehr (2007) reveals that altruism and courtesy are highly correlated with OCB directed toward individuals while civic virtue, contentiousness, and sportsmanship are moderately correlated with OCB directed toward the organization. In this regard, LMCQ as a communication construct reflects only on the efficacy and accuracy of communication in explaining the variance on OCB. Thus, LMCQ does not reflect the courtesy aspect of communication; this is likely to explain the moderate association between LMCQ and individual perception of OCB in this study. Future research should consider the leader-member communication that reflects courtesy such as leader-member rapport management (LRM), as LRM focuses on sociolinguistic of politeness in leader-member relationships (Campbell, White, & Johnson, 2003). Another promising direction for future research is to further investigate the puzzle of determining the contexts in which RLMX is associated with LRM within work group processes that ultimately affect group member's attitudinal or behavioral outcomes.

Given the central premise of the relational dyadic model that communication is a negotiated process through which a dyad reciprocally defines the relationships (Barry & Crant, 2000) and LMX theory in which the leaders tend to differentiate among his or her members (Liden et al., 2006), substantial variance in the relative standings of LMX seems to affect the variances of communication and interaction within groups. Future studies may continue to investigate the LMX evaluation from RLMX standing on group members' behavior within different contexts. In fact, other group characteristics and individual cultural values differences might act to alter RLMX and LRM. Another interesting step for future research is to explore other communicative mediating mechanisms that link RLMX to group member outcomes. For instance, communicative emotion and moods in leader-member dyads may be closely related in defining the dyadic relationships.

In conclusion, this study has provided empirical support for the central roles of RLMX and LMCQ in work groups. In so doing, the study has made valuable contributions to the leadership communication literature and has extended our understanding of leadership and group behavior through leader-member conversation quality. The

study has also highlighted the importance of taking a multilevel polynomial regression and mediation analytical approach in both theory building and methodology to unlock the dyadic relational dynamics that make RLMX a unique leadership perspective from which to view group member's OCB. Finally, the analysis presented herein has provided a number of insights into a salient aspect of RLMX and LMCQ and its effect on OCB in the Malaysian workplace setting. With an awareness of the importance of RLMX and LMCQ, managers are more likely to experience positive dyadic relationships and effective work groups.

Authors' Note

A previous version of this paper was presented at the 68th International Communication Association Annual Conference. The authors would like to thank Professor Jackie Mayfield and the reviewers of this paper for their many helpful comments. The work described in this paper was supported by research grants from Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (Project 14181).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The work described in this paper was supported by research grants from Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (Project 14181).

ORCID iD

Hassan Abu Bakar https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6043-173X

References

Bakar, H. A., Dilbeck, K. E., & McCroskey, J. C. (2010). Mediating role of supervisory communication practices on relations between leader-member exchange and perceived employee commitment to workgroup. *Communication Monographs*, *77*, 637-656.

Bakar, H. A., Jian, G., & Fairhurst, G. (2014). Where do I stand? The interaction of leader–member exchange and performance ratings. *Asian Business & Management*, *13*, 143-170.

Bakar, H. A., & McCann, R. M. (2016). The mediating effect of leader–member dyadic communication style agreement on the relationship between servant leadership and group-level organizational citizenship behavior. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *30*, 32-58.

Bakar, H. A, & McCann, R. M. (2018). An examination of leader-member dyadic politeness of exchange and servant leadership on group member performance. *International Journal of Business Communication*, *55*, 501-525.

Bakar, H. A., & Sheer, V. C. (2013). The mediating role of perceived cooperative communication in the relationship between interpersonal exchange relationships and perceived group cohesion. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *27*, 443-465.

Baker, C. R., & Omilion-Hodges, L. M. (2013). The effect of leader-member exchange differentiation within work units on coworker exchange and organizational citizenship behaviors. *Communication Research Reports*, *30*, 313-322.

Banks, G. C., Batchelor, J. H., Seers, A., O'Boyle, E. H., Jr., Pollack, J. M., & Gower, K. (2014). What does team-member exchange bring to the party? A meta-analytic review of team and leader social exchange. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *35*, 273-295.

Barry, B., & Crant, M. J. (2000). Dyadic communication relationships in organizations: An attribution/expectancy approach. *Organization Science*, *11*, 648-664.

Bell, R. A., Tremblay, S. W., & Buerkel-Rothfuss, N. L. (1987). Interpersonal attraction as a communication accomplishment: Development of a measure of affinity-seeking competence. *Western Journal of Communication*, *51*(1), 1-18.

Berger, C. R., Weber, M. D., Munley, M. E., & Dixon, J. T. (1977). Interpersonal relationship levels and interpersonal attraction. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *1*, 245-261.

Bliese, P. D. (2000). Within-group agreement, non-independence, and reliability: Implications for data aggregation and analysis. In K. K. Klein, & S. W. J. Kozlowski (Eds.), *Multilevel theory, research, and methods in organizations* (pp. 349-381). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bryant, E. M., & Sias, P. M. (2011). Sense making and relational consequences of peer coworker deception. *Communication Monographs*, *78*, 115-137.

Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1984). The fundamental topoi of relational communication. *Communication Monographs*, *51*, 193-214.

Campbell, K. S., White, C. D., & Johnson, D. E. (2003). Leader-member relations as a function of rapport management. *Journal of Business Communication*, *40*, 170-194.

Cho, T. S., & Hambrick, D. C. (2006). Attention as the mediator between top management team characteristics and strategic change: The case of airline deregulation. *Organization Science*, *17*, 453-469.

Dulebohn, J. H., Bommer, W. H., Liden, R. C., Brouer, R. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2012). A meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of leader-member exchange integrating the past with an eye toward the future. *Journal of Management*, *38*, 1715-1759.

Edwards, J. R., & Parry, M. E. (1993). On the use of polynomial regression equations as an alternative to difference scores in organizational research. *Academy of Management Journal*, *36*, 1577-1613.

Eisenberg, E. M., Monge, P. R., & Farace, R. V. (1984). Coorientation on communication rules in managerial dyads. *Human Communication Research*, *11*, 261-271.

Epitropaki, O., & Martin, R. (2013). Transformational–transactional leadership and upward influence: The role of relative leader-member exchanges (RLMX) and perceived organizational support (POS). *Leadership Quarterly*, *24*, 299-315.

Erdogan, B., & Bauer, T. N. (2010). Differentiated leader–member exchanges: The buffering role of justice climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *95*, 1104-1120.

Erdogan, B., & Bauer, T. N. (2014). Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory: The relational approach to leadership. In D. Day (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of leadership and organizations* (pp. 407-433). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Connaughton, S. L. (2014). Leadership: A communication perspective. *Leadership*, *10*(1), 7-35.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2012). Organizational discourse analysis (ODA): Examining leadership as a relational process. *Leadership Quarterly*, *23*, 1043-1062.

Fix, B., & Sias, P. M. (2006). Person-centered communication, leader-member exchange, and employee job satisfaction. *Communication Research Reports*, *23*, 35-44.

Gooty, J., & Yammarino, F. J. (2016). The leader-member exchange relationship: A multisource, cross-level investigation. *Journal of Management*, *42*, 915-935. doi:10.1177/0149206313503009

Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadership Quarterly*, *6*, 219-247.

Grant, A. M. (2012). Leading with meaning: Beneficiary contact, prosocial impact, and the performance effects of transformational leadership. *Academy of Management Journal*, *55*, 458-476.

Greenberg, J., Ashton-James, C. E., & Ashkanasy, N. M. (2007). Social comparison processes in organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *102*, 22-41. doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.09.006

Harris, T. B., Li, N., & Kirkman, B. L. (2014). Leader–member exchange (LMX) in context: How LMX differentiation and LMX relational separation attenuate LMX's influence on OCB and turnover intention. *Leadership Quarterly*, *25*, 314-328.

Hayes, A. F. (2009). Beyond Baron and Kenny: Statistical mediation analysis in the new millennium. *Communication Monographs*, *76*, 408-420.

Henderson, D. J., Liden, R. C., Glibkowski, B. C., & Chaudhry, A. (2008). LMX differentiation: A multilevel review and examination of its antecedents and outcomes. *Leadership Quarterly*, *20*, 517-534.

Herdman, A. O., Yang, J., & Arthur, J. B. (2017). How does leader-member exchange disparity affect teamwork behavior and effectiveness in work groups? The moderating role of leader-leader exchange. *Journal of Management*, *43*, 1498-1523.

Hoffman, B. J., Blair, C. A., Meriac, J. P., & Woehr, D. J. (2007). Expanding the criterion domain? A quantitative review of the OCB literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*, 555-566.

Hooper, D. T., & Martin, R. (2008). Beyond personal leader-member exchange (LMX) quality: The effects of perceived LMX variability on employee reactions. *Leadership Quarterly*, *19*, 20-30.

Hu, J., & Liden, R. C. (2013). Relative leader-member exchange within team contexts: How and when social comparison impact individual effectiveness. *Personnel Psychology*, *66*, 127-172.

Jablin, F. M. (1979). Superior-subordinate communication: The state of the art. *Psychological Bulletin*, *86*, 1201-1222.

Jian, G. (2014). Revisiting the association of LMX quality with perceived role stressors: Evidence for inverted U relationships among immigrant employees. *Communication Research*, *41*, 52-73.

Jian, G., & Dalisay, F. (2017). Conversation at work the effects of leader-member conversational quality. *Communication Research*, *44*, 177-197. doi:10.1177/0093650214565924

Jian, G., Shi, X., & Dalisay, F. (2014). Leader–member conversational quality scale development and validation through three studies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *28*, 375-403.

Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.

Kleinbaum, A. M., Stuart, T. E., & Tushman, M. L. (2013). Discretion within constraint: Homophily and structure in a formal organization. *Organization Science*, *24*, 1316-1336.

Kozlowski, S. W., & Klein, K. J. (2000). A multilevel approach to theory and research in organizations: Contextual, temporal, and emergent processes. In K. J. Klein, & S. W. Kozlowski (Eds.), *Multilevel theory, research, and methods in organizations: Foundations, extensions, and new directions* (pp. 3-90). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kunze, F., De Jong, S. B., & Bruch, H. (2016). Consequences of collective-focused leadership and differentiated individual-focused leadership development and testing of an organizational-level model. *Journal of Management*, *42*, 886-914. doi:10.1177/0149206313498903

Lam, L. W., Peng, K. Z., Wong, C. S., & Lau, D. C. (2017). Is more feedback seeking always better? Leader-member exchange moderates the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and performance. *Journal of Management*, *43*, 2195-2217.

Landry, G., Vandenberghe, C., & Ayed, A. K. B. (2014). Supervisor commitment to employees: Does agreement among supervisors' and employees' perceptions matter? *Leadership Quarterly*, *25*, 885-900.

Le Blanc, P. M., & González-Romá, V. (2012). A team level investigation of the relationship between leader–member exchange (LMX) differentiation, and commitment and performance. *Leadership Quarterly*, *23*, 534-544.

Li, H., Feng, Z., Liu, C., & Cheng, D. (2014). The impact of relative leader-member exchange on employees' work behaviors as mediated by psychological contract fulfillment. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, *42*, 79-88.

Liao, H., Liu, D., & Loi, R. (2010). Looking at both sides of the social exchange coin: A social cognitive perspective on the joint effects of relationship quality and differentiation on creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *53*, 1090-1109.

Liden, R. C., Erdogan, B., Wayne, S. J., & Sparrowe, R. T. (2006). Leader-member exchange, differentiation, and task interdependence: Implications for individual and group performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *27*, 723-746.

Liden, R. C., & Maslyn, J. M. (1998). Multidimensionality of leader-member exchange: An empirical assessment through scale development. *Journal of Management*, *24*, 43-73.

MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, P. M. (2012). Common method bias in marketing: Causes, mechanisms, and procedural remedies. *Journal of Retailing*, *88*, 542-555.

Mathieu, J. E., & Chen, G. (2011). The etiology of the multilevel paradigm in management research. *Journal of Management*, *37*, 610-641.

Matta, F. K., Scott, B. A., Koopman, J., & Conlon, D. E. (2015). Does seeing "eye to eye" effect work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior? A role theory perspective on LMX agreement. *Academy of Management Journal*, *58*, 1686-1708.

Miller, V. Z., Poole, M. S., Seibold, D. R., Myers, K. K., Park, H. S., Monge, P., & Shen, C. (2011). Advancing research in organizational communication through quantitative methodology. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *25*, 4-58.

Olufowote, J. O., Miller, V. D., & Wilson, S. R. (2005). The interactive effects of role change goals and relational exchanges on employee upward influence tactics. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *18*, 385-403.

Omilion-Hodges, L. M., & Baker, C. R. (2017). Communicating leader-member relationship quality: The development of leader communication exchange scales to measure relationship building and maintenance through the exchange of communication-based goods. *International Journal of Business Communication*, *54*, 115-145.

Omilion-Hodges, L. M., Ptacek, J. K., & Zerilli, D. H. (2016). A comprehensive review and communication research agenda of the contextualized workgroup: The evolution and future of leader-member exchange, coworker exchange, and team-member exchange. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *40*, 343-377.

Organ, D. W. (1997). Organizational citizenships behavior: It's construct cleanup time. *Human Performance*, *10*(2), 85-97.

Podsakoff, N. P., Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Maynes, T. D., & Spoelma, T. M. (2014). Consequences of unit-level organizational citizenship behaviors: A review and recommendations for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *35*(Suppl. 1), 87-119.

Podsakoff, N. P., Whiting, S. W., Podsakoff, P. M., & Blume, B. D. (2009). Individual-and organizational-level consequences of organizational citizenship behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*, 122-141.

Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Contemporary approaches to assessing mediation in communication research. In A. F. Hayes, M. D. Slater & L. B. Snyder (Eds.), *The SAGE sourcebook of advance data analysis methods for communication research* (pp. 13-54). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Raudenbush, S. W., Bryk, A. S., Cheong, Y. F., & Congdon, R. T. (2004). *HLM6: Hierarchical linear and nonlinear modeling*. Chicago, IL: Scientific Software International.

Schriesheim, C. A., Wu, J. B., & Cooper, C. D. (2011). A two-study investigation of item wording effects on leader–follower convergence in descriptions of the leader–member exchange (LMX) relationship. *Leadership Quarterly*, *22*, 881-892.

Seibold, D. R., Hollingshead, A. B., & Yoon, K. (2014). Embedded teams and embedding organizations. In L. L. Putnam & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 327-349). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sheer, V. C. (2015). "Exchange lost" in leader–member exchange theory and research: A critique and a reconceptualization. *Leadership*, *11*, 213-229.

Shin, S. J., Kim, T. Y., Lee, J. Y., & Bian, L. (2012). Cognitive team diversity and individual team member creativity: A cross-level interaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, *55*, 197-212.

Sias, P. M. (2005). Workplace relationship quality and employee information experiences. *Communication Studies*, *56*, 375-395.

Sias, P. M., & Jablin, F. M. (1995). Differential superior-subordinate relations, perceptions of fairness, and coworker communication. *Human Communication Research*, *22*, 5-38. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1995.tb00360.x

Sias, P. M., Pedersen, H., Gallagher, E. B., & Kopaneva, I. (2012). Workplace friendship in the electronically connected organization. *Human Communication Research*, *38*, 253-279.

Sin, H. P., Nahrgang, J. D., & Morgeson, F. P. (2009). Understanding why they don't see eye to eye: An examination of leader–member exchange (LMX) agreement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*, 1048-1057.

Smith, C. A., Organ, D. W., & Near, J. P. (1983). Organizational citizenship behavior: Its nature and antecedents. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *68*, 653-663. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.68.4.653

Tasa, K., Taggar, S., & Seijts, G. H. (2007). The development of collective efficacy in teams: A multilevel and longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*(1), 17-27. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.92.1.17

Tse, H. H., Lam, C. K., Lawrence, S. A., & Huang, X. (2013). When my supervisor dislikes you more than me: The effect of dissimilarity in leader–member exchange on coworkers' interpersonal emotion and perceived help. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *98*(6), 974-988.

Thomas, G., Martin, R., Epitropaki, O., Guillaume, Y., & Lee, A. (2013). Social cognition in leader–follower relationships: Applying insights from relationship science to understanding relationship-based approaches to leadership. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *34*, 63-81.

Timmerman, T. A. (2005). Missing persons in the study of group. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *26*, 21-36.

Uhl-Bien, M. (2006). Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. *Leadership Quarterly*, *17*, 654-676.

Vidyarthi, P. R., Liden, R. C., Anand, S., Erdogan, B., & Ghosh, S. (2010). Where do I stand? Examining the effects of leader–member exchange social comparison on employee work behaviors. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *95*, 849-861.

Waldron, V. R. (1991). Achieving communication goals in superior-subordinate relationships: The multi-functionality of upward maintenance tactics. *Communications Monographs*, *58*, 289-306.

Walker, K. L., & Stohl, C. (2012). Communicating in a collaborating group: A longitudinal network analysis. *Communication Monographs*, *79*, 448-474.

Whitman, D. S., Van Rooy, D. L., & Viswesvaran, C. (2010). Satisfaction, citizenship behaviors, and performance in work units: A meta-analysis of collective construct relations. *Personnel Psychology*, *63*, 41-81.

Zhang, Z., Wang, M. O., & Shi, J. (2012). Leader-follower congruence in proactive personality and work outcomes: The mediating role of leader-member exchange. *Academy of Management Journal*, *55*, 111-130.

Zhou, X. T., & Schriesheim, C. (2009). Supervisor-subordinate convergence in descriptions of leader-member exchange (LMX) quality: Review and testable propositions. *Leadership Quarterly*, *20*, 920-932. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.09.007

Author Biographies

Hassan Abu Bakar is an Associate Professor in the Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia. His main research interests are in dyadic communication in workplace, leadership style, organizational communication and intercultural communication. He serves as Director of the Leadership, Innovation and Change at Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Stacey L. Connaughton is an Associate Professor in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University, USA. Her research examines leadership and identification in geographically distributed contexts, particularly as these issues relate to virtual teams/organizations and peacebuilding. She serves as Director of the Purdue Policy Research Institute in Discovery Park at Purdue University.