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Relative leader–member exchange perceptions and employee outcomes in service sector: The role of self-construal in feeling relative deprivation

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ABSTRACT

Based on Social Comparison Theory, this study explores the impact of Relative Leader Member-Exchange Relationship (i.e., RLMX) on employee outcomes of organizational citizenship behaviour, turnover intention, and affective commitment via the mediating role of relative deprivation feeling. Furthermore, integrating research on self-construal, this study sets out to examine the moderating role of a key personal disposition; independent versus interdependent self-construal on the association between employee's RLMX perception and relative deprivation feeling. Results using multi-level analyses from employee – supervisor matched data (N = 271 employees and 65 supervisors) largely supported our hypotheses. This study expands the relational context within which the impact of RLMX perception unfolds beyond the dyad of leader and self, to the triad of leader, self, and co-workers; so that it offers significant theoretical and practical implications, particularly for service sector employees.

KEYWORDS: Relative leader-member exchange; relative deprivation, independent-self; interdependent-self; service sector

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Introduction

Enduring social interactions in organizational life such as leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships inevitably bring about social comparisons that lead employees to be concerned not only about what they get, but also about what others get. According to the premises of Social Comparison Theory (SCT: Festinger, 1954) people, as social beings, have a tendency to make comparisons in order to assess their acquisitions and personal value, and when there is no objective physical standard to serve as a yardstick for comparison, they compare themselves with others who are in a similar position to their own (Festinger, 1954). Accordingly, most recent research on LMX has explored it in its social context, giving rise to new constructs such as Relative Leader-Member Exchange (RLMX) (Henderson et al., 2008) and Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison (Vidyarthi et al., 2010). In this study we focus on Relative Leader-Member Exchange (RLMX), which refers to an individual's own LMX quality compared with the average LMX quality for his/her work group. According to LMX research, leaders do not treat all their followers in the same way; but the leader and each follower form a two-way relationship that can range from low LMX quality (i.e. relationship limited to employment contract based exchanges) to high LMX quality (i.e., relationship characterized by solid trust, respect and work related mutual exchanges) and by these social exchange relationships employees' work attitudes and work outcomes are directly influenced (e.g., Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980). Our main aim is to explore the cognitive and affective mechanisms that underlie reactions to RLMX, and based on Hooper and Martin's (2008) work, we analyze respondent's perception of the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and each employee in the work group (Martin et al., 2018, p.156).

Leader-member exchange and RLMX as a relational leadership model is particularly critical for service sector companies due to its effect on service employees' emotional and behavioural processes through which service quality and service performance is constructed (Wang, 2016). In contrast to manufacturing sector, in service sector organizations' performance is contingent upon service employees' attitudes and behaviours, which directly designate the present and prospective behaviours of customers' about getting or quitting the service (Subramony, & Pugh, 2015; Borucki & Burke, 1999). Previous research on service sector businesses have focused generally on the individual employee's perception of one's own LMX, and investigated how and why this individual LMX quality relates to one's service performance (e.g., Garg & Dhar, 2014; Kim & Koo, 2017; Li et al., 2012; Wang et al.2017). Yet, the way of doing work in service sector mostly involves interdependent tasks to be completed by the members of work group throughout the service process (e.g., Batt, 2002). For that reason, service sector employees have opportunities to observe each other's LMX relationships during various interactions at service process (Yoon & Yoon, 2019). Working in a group provides employees with a context for social comparison, which is why employees are likely to compare their LMX quality with the LMX quality of their colleagues in a work group (Henderson et al.,2008; Hu & Liden, 2013). If the value of an employee's LMX quality relates more to its embedded value within the workgroup; which is often the case when the nature of getting work done requires group-based work; then it is the employee's RLMX rather than his/her individual LMX quality that becomes more influential on his/her work attitudes and behaviours (Bolino & Tunley, 2009; Henderson et al., 2008; Vidyarthi et al., 2010; Yoon & Yoon, 2019).

In line with the premises of SCT, relative deprivation provides the integrated cognitive and emotional modelling of social comparison, perception of injustice and affective arousal as successive processes derived by one's own perception (Crosby, 1976; Smith et al., 2012). Researchers focusing on relative deprivation asserted that deprivation is relative rather than absolute; explicitly, the affective arousal is not a direct function of one's actual deprivation, but it is indeed a response to subjective realities based on one's own perceptions (Colquitt, 2004; Crosby,

1984). Crosby (1976) explains this by referring to the relative nature of deprivation that *“those who are the most deprived in an objective sense are not always the ones likely to experience the most deprivation (p.85)”*. A person's emotional reactions are based on how the person subjectively perceives a particular situation (Lazarus, 1982, 1991; Overwalleet al.,1992, p. 313; Roseman et al.,1990, p. 899; Saks, 2006). Accordingly, in this study while we adopt relative deprivation as an underlying mechanism of the association between RLMX and employee work outcomes, we operationalize RLMX as a subjective individual level variable as to be relevant to one’s relative deprivation

Although there has been a stream of research that has focused on explaining why employees with varying personal traits respond differently to workplace relationships (e.g., Hochwarter & Byrne, 2005; Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Lapointe et al., 2020); there still exists a need to investigate employee's self-construal as an individual-level boundary condition within this perspective. It is highly important to understand the role of employee self-construal as a boundary condition especially for being able to formulate HR practices that would directly address the employees who are more prone to feel relative deprivation. In the light of these evaluations, we see that there is a knowledge and research gap in understanding role of employee’s self-construal as a boundary condition in employee's affective responses to RLMX perceptions. With an aim to contribute to fill this gap, in this study we used the theoretical underpinnings of Social Comparison Theory (SCT: Festinger, 1954) and investigated how an employee’s feeling of relative deprivation influences employee attitudes and behaviors. Further we studied how an employee’s self-construal as a personal disposition acts as a boundary condition for this relationship (Please see Figure-1 below). We tested our model with a data-set collected from 271 employees and their 65 immediate supervisors at service sector companies in Turkey.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

This study makes a number of contributions for theory as well as practice. It extends the premises of SCT to work relationships particularly to the relationships between employees and their supervisors by revealing the mechanisms whereby RLMX leads to employee outcomes via feelings of relative deprivation. Furthermore, it makes a theoretical contribution by considering the boundary condition of self-construal and brings a contingency perspective to LMX by examining the effects of two distinct dimensions of self-construal— ‘independent-self’ and ‘interdependent-self’— as a moderator of the relationship between RLMX perception and relative deprivation; a number of researchers have pointed to this as a needed area of future research (Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Yukl, 2002). While former research assumed the self and self-identity as autonomous and independent of the influence of others, this assumption has changed in line with the findings of cross-cultural research together with today's multi-cultural work and social settings (Cross et al., 2011, p.142). The findings of previous research highlight the significant effect of culture-specific appraisals regarding emotions (Diener et al., 2003; Scherer & Brosch, 2009). The comprehension that self-identity is culturally diverse, and so may vary among employees in an organizational setting necessitates companies to develop more customized management and HR practices to meet employees’ diverse perspectives. Beyond the common approach in RLMX research, this study focuses on the formative effect of an employee's self-construal on the association between one’s RLMX perception and relative deprivation feeling. While doing so, we conceptualize RLMX from individual employee's own perspective to align with his/her relative deprivation.

Practical implications of the study concern HR practitioners, especially in the service sector Previous service research often investigated the effects of individual level LMX on employee work

outcomes, and usually missing out the fact that LMX is assessed by its embedded value within workgroup context, which is the common way of doing work in service businesses (Yoon & Yoon, 2019, p.2667). Moreover, even though there has been a growing body of research about the effects of RLMX on employee attitudes and behaviors, the research that focus on the mediation mechanisms for the effects of RLMX on employee cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes are underdeveloped; and so needs further research (e.g., Li, Feng, Liu, & Cheng, 2014; Tse, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2012). Although there are few studies that integrate relative deprivation with LMX for exploring employee's outcomes, these studies did not investigate any individual level boundary condition, but only team level constraints (e.g., Zhao et al., 2018).

Relative leader-member exchange

Employees who have high-quality LMX relationships with their leaders have work-related advantages over employees with lower-quality LMX relationships because they receive more work-related tangible and intangible resources (Dansereau et al., 1975; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). This creates in-groups and out-groups within the organization, and leads to differing perceptions of organizational justice among different employees which become salient through ongoing social comparison processes fed by work-related social interactions (Scandura, 1999; Sias 1996; Sias & Jablin, 1995). Embedded in various social interactions, these social comparisons have been shown to affect the cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses of employees (Greenberg et al., 2007; Wood, 1989). Recent research on LMX draws attention to the multi-layered organizational context and views LMX as systems of interdependent dyadic relationships rather than dyadic employee-leader relationships. Accordingly, it has been claimed that within work groups, high- and low-quality LMX relationships are determined in relative terms rather than by a standard point of reference level for determining what a high- or low-quality LMX relationship is (Henderson et al., 2008). This means that employees' evaluations are driven primarily by social comparisons, which provide an idea of their relative treatment and standing in the work group.

Accordingly, most recent research on LMX has explored it in its social context, giving rise to some new constructs, including but not limited to, Relative Leader-Member Exchange (RLMX, Henderson et al., 2008) and LMX Differentiation (Henderson et al., 2009). RLMX defined as an individual's own LMX quality compared with the average LMX quality for his/her work group (Henderson et al., 2008), is traditionally measured using the procedure by Kozlowski and Klein (2000). As commonly used by researchers (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013; Tse et al., 2012) this procedure is as follows; first, using an LMX scale, data is collected from each member of the work group to determine his/her individual LMX score. Then, the average LMX score for the work group is calculated, and the focal employee's individual LMX score is compared with the average score from the group. Thus measured, as the difference between one's own LMX and the average LMX for the team, RLMX serves as objective social comparison information that can influence how the focal employee views his/her relative standing in the work team (Hu & Liden, 2013). Previous research shows the significance of RLMX for work outcomes; often by means of some mediating and moderating mechanisms that include but not limited to psychological contract fulfilment (e.g., Li et al, 2014), role engagement (e.g., Li & Liao, 2014), and cooperation (Bakar et al.,2018). Likewise, as another recent construct, LMX differentiation reflects the "*process by which a leader, through engaging in differing types of exchange patterns with subordinates, forms different quality exchange relationships with them*" (Henderson et al., 2009, p. 519). Like the operationalization of RLMX, the operationalization of LMX differentiation is done as a statistical

measure of varying LMX relationships within a workgroup, either as the standard deviation or variance of group members' LMX scores (Choi et al., 2020, p.569). The significance of LMX differentiation for work outcomes has been displayed by the findings of previous research (e.g., Martin et al., 2018).

Moreover, there has been a recent stream of research that utilize individual's own subjective perception in the operationalization of constructs (Martin et al., 2018); including, Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison (LMXSC, Vidyarthi et al., 2010), Perception of LMX Differentiation (PLMXD, Choi et al., 2020); and Perceived LMX Variability (Hooper & Martin, 2008). LMXSC developed by Vidyarthi and colleagues (2010) is a subjective measure of an employee's relative position in terms of six different relationship aspects; including, affect, loyalty, support, respect, contribution and overall exchange quality (p.852). Likewise, Choi and colleagues (2020) conceptualized PLMXD as a subjective measure that reflects an individual's perception of the extent to which leader treats some group members better than others in terms of the relationship aspects of liking, loyalty, support, and respect. In a similar vein, perceived LMX variability is offered as a subjective perceptual construct reflecting an individual employee's perception about the amount of differentiation of LMX quality levels within the work group (Hooper & Martin, 2008).

In this study, we aim to explore the cognitive and affective mechanisms that underlie reactions to RLMX. For this specific purpose, we conceptualize RLMX in a way that resembles LMXSC, (Vidyarthi et al., 2010) and Perceived LMX Variability (Hooper & Martin, 2008) constructs by adopting the focal individuals' perceptions. However, we measure RLMX in a different way than LMXSC, which is operationalized by comparative questions about six different facets of the respondent's relationship with the leader. Relative Leader-Member Exchange (RLMX), as a construct displays the relative standing of an employee within the workgroup based on LMX quality which indicates the level of trust, respect and support received from the supervisor (Henderson et al., 2008). RLMX is a separate construct than LMX, since one's own LMX does not itself reflect whether the supervisor of the group treats some of the group members better than others (Choi et al., 2020, p.572). Being operationalized as a statistical variable, RLMX is as an objective measure based on the range of LMX scores among the team members, where each team member assesses their own LMX (Henderson et al., 2008; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Therefore, as an aggregate perception of all group members, RLMX may not necessarily be known to an individual employee (Choi et al., 2020, p.568). When the aim is exploring the individual employee's affective and behavioural reactions towards RLMX, then taking RLMX as an aggregated perception of all group members may not be relevant to cognitive and affective processes of the individual employee. On the other hand, if RLMX is operationalized from the individual employee's own perspective, that is, the employee's own assessment of his/her LMX quality with that of workgroup members' LMX, then it may become more relevant to the employee's affective reactions, especially by a perception of injustice or an evaluation of unfairness (Cohen-Charash & Muller, 2007; Greenberg, et al., 2007).

In conceptualising RLMX, we mainly adopt Hooper and Martin's (2008) measure, which asks not about the specific facets of one's relationship with the leader; but simply asks about one's own and one's workgroup members' relationship quality with the leader directly to the respondent. This measurement in its original form provides a mental picture of the respondent's perception of the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and each employee in the work group, including him/herself, and has been shown to directly align with the theoretical definition of LMX (Hooper & Martin, 2008, p. 24). We first ask the focal employees the questions of the LMX variability measure; and then, use the resulting data to calculate their RLMX perceptions: that is, how they perceive their standing within their work group in terms of relationship quality with the supervisor.

Relative deprivation

Enduring social interactions in organizational life provides a fruitful context for social comparisons of valuable resources like relationship with leader, by leading employees to be concerned not only about what they get, but also about what others get. Accordingly, within a work group, an employee's personal evaluation of social exchange relationships, including a comparison between his/her own and those of other group members', may produce negative emotions triggered by a perception of injustice or unfairness (Cohen-Charash & Muller, 2007; Greenberg, et al., 2007). Relative deprivation, as an integrated cognitive and affective process which is initially triggered by a social comparison, is one of the most common feelings among employees as a result of ongoing comparisons within organizational life (Olson & Hazelwood, 2014).

A feeling of relative deprivation may be triggered when a person compares the treatment, opportunities, or outcomes that others receive to those that he/she desires and feels entitled to (Crosby, 1976). Feeling of relative deprivation occurs when individuals lack resources available to others, and so experience a sense of deprivation that is exhibited in negative affective reactions (Crosby, 1976, 1984; Martin, 1981; Feldman & Turnley, 2004; Buunk & Janssen, 1992; Feldman, et al., 2002; Mark & Folger, 1984). The deprivation experience, as a feeling of resentment, is likely to influence individuals' key behaviours and attitudes. In the work context, relative deprivation has been found to be negatively associated with job satisfaction (e.g., Lee & Martin, 1991), in-role performance (e.g., Williams & Anderson, 1991), and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB; Feldman & Turnley, 2004); it has been found to be positively associated with employee turnover and counter-productive work behaviours (Toh & Denisi, 2003). Although different theoretical frameworks conceptualize relative deprivation differently (e.g. Crosby, 1976; Davies, 1959; Gurr, 1970; Runciman, 1966), all agree that feeling of relative deprivation is both cognitive and emotional: the cognitive component reflects the perception of deprivation, while the affective component reflects the emotion of discontent (Olson & Hafer, 1996).

Feeling of relative deprivation is similar to some other negative emotions, such as envy and jealousy (e.g. Heider, 1958; Ortony et al., 1988; Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 47). However, it differs from these emotions in that a perception of injustice is explicit in its conceptualization; in contrast, the existence of negative emotions like envy, shame, jealousy, and indignation do not depend on the perception of injustice as an essential precondition (e.g. Kim et al., 2010). According to Smith and colleagues (2012) relative deprivation is a social psychological concept that links the individual with interpersonal and intergroup levels of analysis via one's personal subjective perspective shaping the individual's emotions, cognitions, and behaviour. In view of that, in this study we utilized relative deprivation as the main explanatory mechanism for the effects of an employee's RLMX perception on his/her work outcomes.

RLMX perception and Relative deprivation feeling

A person's convictions are shaped by his/her own interpretations and beliefs about what he/she experiences, and these individual realities in turn drive behaviour, including work behaviour and outcomes (Saks, 2006). Whatever its source, all available information is subject to an individual's own evaluation and interpretation, and such perceptual evaluation affects the individual's affective reactions and feelings (e.g., Lazarus, 1982, 1991; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Appraisal theorists argue that it is individual perception and related personal interpretation rather than events or situations themselves that determine what a person feels (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990, p. 899; Overwalle et al., 1992, p. 313). In a similar vein, the study by Beugre (1998) on justice found that what matters most is not reality per se, but subjective reality driven by the subject's perception of reality. Likewise, Martin and colleagues (2018) argued that subjective measures that consider the

individual's self-perception are more relevant to justice related social construction processes, compared to the objective ones.

In service sector, the way of doing work usually involves interdependent tasks being completed by different group members (e.g., Batt, 2002). In such a context, it may become much harder to make individual performance evaluations based on divergent contributions of each employee (Rynes et al., 2005). In reaction to such an ambiguity in performance evaluations within service business, employees may focus more intensely on their intuitive evaluations concerning whether they received the same treatment with other work group members, instead of rationally questioning the ratio of their work input to their work output (Choi, et al., 2020, p. 570). Consequently, employee's subjective evaluation affects his/her work attitudes and behaviours (Martin, et al., 2018), through the causal relationship of a person's perception and one's emotional response, as shown by the extant appraisal literature (e.g., Lazarus, 1982; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). The occurrence of relative deprivation feeling, which includes such a perception-emotion causal relationship process, is contingent upon the individual's personal perception and the subjective interpretation of his/her position compared to the referent others (Crosby, 1976; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015; Smith, et al., 2012). It is the social comparison what initially triggers the relative deprivation process (Olson & Hazelwood, 2014). At the individual level, relative deprivation includes three successive psychological processes; cognitive comparisons, cognitive appraisals, and judgments about the unfairness of the situation resulting in affective arousal (Pettigrew, 2016, p.9).

Based on the propositions of SCT (Festinger, 1954; Greenberg, et al., 2007), employees compare themselves with other employees who are in similar positions. This comparison also involves access to valuable resources as well as the quality of the relationships with immediate supervisor, i.e. RLMX. Employees are concerned not only with their own relationship quality with their supervisor, but also with that of others. Accordingly, in a work context an employee's subjective assessment of social exchange relationships with their supervisors, including a comparison between one's own and those of other group members', would initiate feeling of relative deprivation as a result of perception of injustice and feeling of resentment (Crosby, 1976, 1984; Martin, 1981; Feldman & Turnley, 2004). Employees who perceive their RLMX is better (stronger PRLMX) in comparison to their peers in their work groups, they are less likely to feel deprived of personal resources that their leaders provide to them (a negative association between PRLMX and feelings of relative deprivation). This is because enjoying a high-quality relationship with one's immediate supervisors offer unique and personal resources such as attention, focus and positive affect, which reduces feelings of deprivation. In contrast, employees who perceive their RLMX to be worse and weaker in comparison to others in the work group, they are more likely to report feelings of relative deprivation. The logic behind this argument is that lacking good-quality relationship with one's supervisor, employees are likely to note that they lack attention, focus and benefits from one's supervisor, described and conceptualised as intensified feelings of relative deprivation.

Accordingly, the first hypothesis of our study is:

H1. RLMX perception is negatively associated with feelings of relative deprivation (*after controlling for LMX and traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members*)

The moderation effect of follower self-construal: An individual-level boundary condition

Emotions are based on how an individual perceives a particular situation; that is, emotions are brought about through personal cognitive appraisals of events and situations (Lazarus, 1982, 1991; Smith & Kirby, 2001; Smith & Lazarus, 1993) Emotions are associated with appraisal patterns, and similar appraisals tend to produce similar emotional responses (Siemer et al., 2007). Therefore, when two individuals respond to the same incident with different emotions, this means that they must have appraised the situation differently. Established social psychology research clearly supports this view, showing that social perception does not depend solely on sensory input but is also subject to various processes that result in appraisals that are modified by the perceiver's values, expectations, emotional needs, and other perceiver-contingent factors (e.g. Bodenhausen & Hugenberg, 2009). Similarly, psychology research makes it clear that a person's needs are the most important influencer of the selection of stimuli and that they thus give rise to specific behaviours (Murray, 1938; Edwards, 1959; McClelland, 1980; Murray, 1938).

Crosby (1976, p.91) posits that a sense of injustice produces feelings of relative deprivation. While the cognitive component of relative deprivation reflects a sense of injustice through social comparison, the affective component comprises feelings of resentment based on the same social comparison (Tougas, et al., 2004). The magnitude of the perceived discrepancy (cognition of relative deprivation) has an effect on the intensity of the associated feeling (felt deprivation). However, the intensity of the emotional component is contingent not only on the magnitude of the cognition, but also on possible moderating factors, which may include individual differences (Mikula, 1984; Mikula, et. al, 1998). In an organizational setting, perceptions of the salience and value of resources are important in accounting for feelings of relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976; Folger, 1986; Martin, 1981). The experience of deprivation is most pronounced and amplified when perceptions of resource loss are most salient and significant to the individual (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2005; Roberson, 2006). Based on this logic, we argue that the association between individuals' RLMX perception and relative deprivation is not linear, but depends on contextual conditions. Individuals' differing emotional reactions towards feelings of relative deprivation can be traced back to differences in social perception, and specifically to differences in how individuals identify themselves in social comparisons. In this respect, employees' personal dispositions may be key in understanding the differing impact that LMX-based considerations have on different individuals. In reference to the fact that an individual's self-construal influences his/her cognition, emotions, motivation, and perceptions as a personal disposition factor (Markus & Kitayama, 1991); we adopt a contingency perspective, integrating self-construal as a moderating condition on the association between an individual's RLMX perception and relative deprivation.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that individual self-construal can be understood and defined in terms of two distinct dimensions: "independent-self" and "interdependent-self." The former is a person's self-image reflecting his/her value system, and the latter is a person's self-image in terms of his/her connectedness to others. While independent self-construal denotes the individual's image of self as unique and distinct from others; interdependent self-construal denotes how closely the individual sees him/herself being connected with others (Singelis, 1994). Theoretical assertions and related research on self-construal indicate that for individuals characterized by independent self-construal, the role of "others" is to serve as social comparisons used for self-evaluation; while for individuals characterized by interdependent self-construal, "others" become part of the definition of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 230). Moreover, validating one's internal attributes is the basis of self-satisfaction for independent self-construal individuals, while the ability to adjust, restrain oneself, and maintain harmony with the social context is the prevailing value orientation for interdependent self-construal individuals.

In varying degrees, these two dimensions of self-construal may coexist within individuals (Cross & Markus, 1991; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Levinson et al., 2011; Singelis, 1994). In other words, every individual, even though in varying degrees, establish both an independent and an interdependent form of self-construal; but almost always individuals tend to use one form of self-construal more than another to guide their cognition, emotion, and behaviour (Gudykunst & Lee, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Considered in this way, interdependent self-construal and independent self-construal have to be measured as separate constructs; and their functions on an individual person's affective, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes need to be examined independently (Yang et al., 2020, p. 2221).

According to the multiple needs model of justice (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2001; Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008), individuals' dominant needs influence their cognition of and reactions to injustice. At the same time, how individuals construe themselves also influences their cognition: independent-self individuals view themselves as being distinguished from others by focusing on achievement needs, while interdependent-self individuals describe themselves as part of a group and focus on social acceptance/belongingness needs (Heine et al., 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Moreover, individuals' self-construal systematically shapes their emotional experience; independent-self individuals are more likely to experience ego-focused emotions such as anger, while interdependent-self individuals are more inclined to experience other-focused emotions like shame (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 235).

In accordance with the above line of reasoning, given that an individual's perception depends on his/her personal disposition (Sherman et al., 2013; Serfass & Sherman, 2013), which results from his/her primary needs (Murray, 1938), we can assume that a person's self-construal, which establishes the main scope of self-identification, is the main dispositional factor derived from his/her dominant identification needs: either social acceptance, or achievement (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Applying this logic to the subject of our study, we argue that the negative association between an individual's RLMX perception and feelings of relative deprivation will be strengthened for employees characterized by high independent self-construal. Such individuals are defined as being autonomous and achievement-oriented, with a strong focus on self-success and competition (Lee et al., 2000). Their ultimate goal is not to maintain group success or harmony, but to distinguish themselves from others by focusing on self-enhancement and development as well as acquiring more resources. As a consequence, we expect individuals characterized by high independent self-construal to feel more deprived (i.e., to experience higher relative deprivation) than individuals characterized by low independent self-construal in a context where they perceive their RLMX standing to be low. This is because high independent self-construal individuals are eager to achieve goals and raise their standing within their team (Lee et al., 2000). In order to do this, obtaining resources from their supervisors by having higher RLMX standing becomes an important work goal; and when they are deprived of such resources, their reactions will be stronger and more negative than the reactions of individuals who are low on independent self-construal (Lee et al., 2000).

Self-construal as a boundary condition is particularly important given that it establishes the main scope of self-identification (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). We claim that the negative relationship between an employee's RLMX perception and relative deprivation feeling will be higher for employees with high independent self-construal given that they are more interested in distinguishing themselves from others by focusing on self-enhancement and obtaining resources from their supervisors; as a result, they experience higher relative deprivation in response to perception of lower RLMX. Accordingly, the second hypothesis of the study is:

H2. Independent self-construal moderates the association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation in such a way that this negative relationship is strengthened for employees higher on independent self-construal and weakened for employees lower on independent self-construal.

On the other hand, high interdependent self-construal employees are likely to value fitting in with others in a team setting, and to pursue harmony and group cohesion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such individuals are likely to make efforts to maintain positive social relations and connections with others and to avoid social mishaps and their detrimental negative consequences (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 230). Individuals who value group harmony and collaboration are likely to avoid focus on the self and promotion (Triandis, 1989). For such interdependent self-construal individuals, evaluating their RLMX standing within the group would be seen as risky since the results of their evaluation might require them to confront other team members, resulting in harmony-damaging conflict. From this lens, we expect individuals high on interdependent self-construal to feel less deprived than those who are low on interdependent self-construal in a context where they perceive their RLMX to be low. For such individuals, how resources are distributed in a team setting is less important than how overall group cohesion is maintained. These individuals draw on and benefit from the resources of other team members in the form of meaningful social interactions, connections, and communication. Group cohesion and group achievement constitute important sources of positive self-identification for these individuals, and so they are less likely to feel deprived if they receive fewer resources from their leaders than their colleagues do. Individuals with higher interdependent self-construal would be more interested in group harmony, which results in lower reactions of negative emotions and felt deprivation based on their lower RLMX perceptions compared with the individuals with high independent-self construal (Lee et al., 2000). Accordingly, our study's third hypothesis is:

H3. Interdependent self-construal moderates the association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation in such a way that this negative relationship is weakened for employees higher on interdependent self-construal and strengthened for employees lower on interdependent self-construal.

The mediation effect of relative deprivation: The affect-based link between RLMX perception and work outcomes

Deprivation requires a subject for its existence; that is, an individual must feel deprived of *something*. In the context of social exchange relationships with a leader, it is high-quality LMX that the individual feels deprived of (Anand et al., 2016; Herdman et al., 2017). In the case of *relative* deprivation, however, the subject matter is RLMX: one's LMX position in comparison to that of referent others. When RLMX is investigated from the individual's own perspective, as is the case in the current research, it is an individual's RLMX perception that is the subject. Employees who perceive their RLMX standing within the work group to be high feel that they benefit from an abundance of resources provided by their leader, such as social support, training, and good career opportunities (Hu & Liden, 2013, p.131). Receiving substantial work-related resources due to having a better relationship with the leader than one's workmates is likely to reduce any sense of relative deprivation as the employee benefits from the advantages and opportunities those resources provide (Herdman et al., 2017). We argue that for employees who feel less deprived in their relationships with their supervisors, these employees are likely to react positively and demonstrate

positive attitudes. To capture attitudes, we included employees' affective commitment to the organization and turnover intention (i.e., intention to leave the organization) in our research model; to capture behaviour, we incorporated OCB. To illustrate, imagine an employee who observes and enjoys a better-quality relationship with his / her supervisor in comparison to what other employees have with the same supervisor. This focal employee will feel abundant with resources (e.g., focus, affect, attention from supervisor) emanating from the unique relationship with his / her supervisor, leading to lowered extent of feeling deprivation. In other words, we propose a negative association between PRLMX and feelings of relative deprivation. In turn, feeling less deprived of the unique relationships with one's supervisor in comparison to what other employees have with the same supervisor, this focal employee is likely to exhibit favourable attitudes in the form of enhanced affective commitment and favourable behaviours in the form of reduced intention to leave the organization and demonstration of increased OCB.

Affective commitment to the organization is considered to be a key indicator of the quality of the employee-organisation relationship (Meyer et al., 2002; Rhoades et al., 2001) and of employees' reactions to their treatment by the organisation (Ogbonnaya et al., 2017). Previous research showed that there is a positive relationship among RLMX and affective commitment since high RLMX signals relative gratification for the employee (Bolino & Turnley, 2009; Zhao et al., 2018). In the current study, we adopt individual employee's perspective of RLMX, and so integrate RLMX perception. Feelings of relative deprivation that are based on RLMX perception are likely to influence an individual's affective commitment towards the organization. Employees who are content because they perceive their RLMX to be high are likely to attribute the favourable treatment they receive not just to their leader but also to the overall organization, and thus to feel attached to the organization (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2001). Accordingly, in a work context an employee's subjective assessment of lower RLMX would initiate feeling of relative deprivation as a result of perception of injustice and feeling of resentment (Crosby, 1976, 1984; Martin, 1981; Feldman & Turnley, 2004) which in turn would reduce affective commitment. On the contrary, experiencing a favourable relationship with the leader enhances the employee's mood at work, and a positive mood towards work and the work environment further strengthens the employee's affective commitment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010). These arguments, which posit that favourable feelings and attitudes emanating from perception of high RLMX and low relative deprivation are generalized to the organization, lead to our fourth hypothesis:

H4. Relative deprivation mediates the association between employees' RLMX perception and their affective commitment to the organization (*after controlling for LMX and traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members*).

Although most existing LMX research focuses on the positive aspects of LMX by investigating the reactions of employees who have high-quality LMX, the fact that different employees in a work group have different exchange relationships with the leader inevitably has justice-related implications for employees via the effects of ongoing social interactions and social comparison processes (Scandura, 1999; Sias 1996). Justice judgments are contingent mainly upon individuals' perceptions (Beugre, 1998), and they trigger affective outcomes (Greenberg, et al., 2007). As intensive social interaction processes, leadership and LMX relationships are expected to trigger strong emotional outcomes when social comparison processes give rise to perceptions of injustice (Cohen-Charash & Muller, 2007; Gooty, et al., 2010; Lazarus, 2000).

Relative deprivation reflects both a cognitive and an affective response triggered by the perception of injustice in social exchange relationships (Tougas, et al., 2004). According to the

premises of relative deprivation, a sense of injustice is an integral part of relative deprivation feeling (Crosby, 1976, p. 91; Folger, 1986; Runciman, 1966; Martin, 1981). A feeling of relative deprivation based on an employee's perception that his/her RLMX is low is likely to increase that person's intention to leave the organization because the person feels that he/she is being treated in an unjust manner. Employees who are dissatisfied because they perceive their RLMX to be low are likely to connect this unfavourable cognition to their membership in the organization, and to consider leaving. Accordingly, our study's fifth hypothesis is:

H5. Relative deprivation mediates the association between employees' RLMX perception and their intention to leave the organization (*after controlling for LMX and traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members*).

An employee's RLMX standing within the work group may impact the employee's ability to successfully perform his/her work through its influence on tangible and intangible work-related resources and support he/she receives from the leader (Hu & Liden, 2013, p.131). Previous research indicates that employees with high-quality LMX assume greater job responsibilities and contribute to other organizational units (Liden & Graen, 1980). It has also been shown that the feeling of relative deprivation is associated with lower levels of organizational commitment (Feldman et al., 2002). Accordingly, an employee who perceives that his/her RLMX is high may develop a greater desire to contribute to the organization (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013). This desire to contribute may develop beyond the employee's given job description, and is referred to as organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Based on this previous research, we assume that favourable feelings and attitudes towards the leader, emanating from an employee's perception of high RLMX and low relative deprivation, are likely to trigger a desire to contribute on the side of the employee, resulting in higher levels of OCB. Accordingly, our final hypothesis is:

H6. Relative deprivation mediates the association between employees' RLMX perception and their OCB (*after controlling for LMX and traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members*).

Method

Sample and Procedure

The data used in this study were collected from 271 employees and their 65 immediate supervisors at service sector companies located in Istanbul, Turkey. All the employees were members of work groups of 3 to 8 people who worked interdependently on tasks in a common physical environment and had frequent face-to-face interactions with their supervisor and each other on a daily basis. The sample was 32% female and 68% male, with an average age of 34 years (s.d. = 1.43) and an average tenure of 4.8 years (s.d. = 1.65). The data are not publicly available due to the restrictions (the assurance of privacy provided to the participants to join the research in first place) and upon reasonable request, information about the data and findings can be provided by the second author of this manuscript.

All the participants of our sample come from service industry. During the initial planning and implementation stage of our project, our idea was to access and reach out to service industry, which composes an important percentage of revenue generation in the context of Turkey. Six sub-sectors

are represented and these include: Education, Food (restaurants & cafes), Retail, Customer Services (hairdresser, beauty salon), Financial Services and Others.

Two separate questionnaires were designed for the data collection: one for team members (employees) and one for supervisors (team leaders). These were sent separately to 450 employees and their 105 immediate supervisors. To assure confidentiality, rather than writing the names of employees and supervisors, we assigned a two-level identifier, one to identify the work group and one to identify the focal employee. To match an employee's questionnaire responses with his/her supervisor's questionnaire responses, we matched the identifier codes and then coded the data. Due to cases of unreturned questionnaires, not all returned questionnaires were part of a complete employee-supervisor dyad. These questionnaires (without a matching identifier code) were excluded from the sample. As a result, 60% of the employee-supervisor dyads who were initially contacted, that is, 271 employees and their 65 immediate supervisors, formed the final data set.

In the employee questionnaire, employees were asked to evaluate the quality of their LMX relationship with their immediate supervisor using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = satisfactory, 4 = good, or 5 = very good. They were also asked to provide their perception of the quality of their fellow team members' LMX relationships with the supervisor. This was done by having each member write down the total number of employees in his/her team (including him/herself), and then distribute this number across five LMX Distribution boxes, each representing (labelled with) one of the five LMX quality categories (from 1 = very poor to 5 = very good). In this way, each participant depicted his/her perception of the LMX variability in his/her team. In addition, each employee was also asked to assess his/her feeling of relative deprivation, using the scale of Tougas and colleagues (2004). Finally, each employee answered questions regarding his/her job satisfaction, affective commitment to the organization, and intention to leave the organization. On the other hand, the questionnaire for supervisors included questions regarding the organizational citizenship behavior of the focal employee.

On average, employees spent 12.11 years in the job, 5.93 years in their company. Their average age was 31.54 years and 63% of them were male. The distribution of their education attainment is as follows: 37% UG, 33% PG and 30% Others. On average, supervisors spent 22.21 years in their job, 12.68 years in their company. Their average age was 46 years old. The distribution of their education attainment is as follows: 43% UG, 31% PG and 26% Others.

Measures

All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) unless otherwise stated below.

RLMX. To operationalize RLMX, we followed the procedure proposed by Kozlowski and Klein (2000), explained above. However, as the main aim of the current study is to explore the cognitive and affective reactions that influence the effects of RLMX on an individual's work outcomes, we also used Hooper and Martin's (2008) LMX distribution measure in order to collect data from each individual team member regarding his/her perceptual evaluation of the quality of each team member's relationship with the leader, including his/her own. The term "relationship quality," which this LMX distribution measure asks respondents to evaluate, not only directly aligns with the theoretical definition of LMX, it also exhibits strong construct validity when benchmarked against scores on the LMX-7 questionnaire developed by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995); Hooper and Martin's (2008) empirical validation of the LMX distribution measure found its self-LMX scores to have a correlation of 0.75 with self-LMX scores obtained on the LMX-7. Moreover, Hooper and Martin (2008) showed that these two different LMX measures produced similar effect sizes when correlated with known LMX outcomes (p. 24). In calculating RLMX following the Kozlowski and Klein

(2000) procedure, we subtracted the average LMX score for the work group from the focal employee's LMX score as per Tse, Ashkanasy and Dasborough (2012) rather than using the polynomial regression method of Edwards & Parry (1993) as proposed by Vidyarthi and colleagues (2010). The reason for this is that polynomial regression method was employed to deal with problems associated with difference scores between two perceptual variables (Edwards, 1995). However, as with the research by Tse and colleagues (2012), in our research we are not using two perceptual variables from different sources; therefore, simple subtraction to obtain difference scores works well.

Relative Deprivation. To measure employees' feelings of relative deprivation, the scale developed by Tougas and colleagues (2004), which is a variation of the previously-developed personal relative deprivation scale of Tougas, Beaton, and Veilleux (1991), was used. This scale consists of four matched pairs of items, with the first item of each pair measuring a cognitive component of relative deprivation and the second measuring the corresponding affective component. As Tougas and colleagues (2004) suggest, we derived composite scores for each of the four item pairs by averaging the cognitive component score and the affective component score for each complementary pair of items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$; PCA = .83). An example of the cognitive and affective items for one of the item pairs of the scale is: "Do you feel that you are less appreciated than others by your immediate supervisor?" and "To what extent are you satisfied with this situation?"

Self-Construal. Employee self-construal, as a separate measurement of *interdependent self-construal* and *independent self-construal*, was measured using the 12-item scales for these constructs developed by Singelis (1994). An example of an *interdependent self-construal* item is: "It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group" ($\alpha = .84$; PCA = .91). An example of an *independent self-construal* item is: "I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards" ($\alpha = .83$).

Affective Commitment to the Organization. Affective organizational commitment is measured using 8-item scale of Allen & Meyer (1990). An example item from the scale is: "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own" ($\alpha = .89$; PCA = .89).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Supervisors evaluated the OCB of employees they directly supervise using the six-item scale developed by Podsakoff and colleagues (1997). An example item is: "He/She provides constructive suggestions about how the crew (work group) can improve its effectiveness" ($\alpha = .87$; PCA = .87).

Intention to Quit. Employee intention to leave the organization was measured utilizing the five-item scale adapted by Wayne and colleagues (1997) based on items developed by Landau and Hammer (1986) and Nadler, Jenkins, Cammann, and Lawler (1975). An example item is: "I am actively looking for a job outside my company" ($\alpha = .91$; PCA = .91).

Control variables. In our analyses, we controlled for various demographic variables including the age, gender, and tenure of the focal employees, the industry they work in, and their educational background. The direction and the strength of our results did not change, hence these variables were excluded from subsequent analyses (Becker et al., 2015).

Furthermore, to test the incremental validity of our findings, we controlled for two constructs: individual-level LMX quality and traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members. As explained above, the latter measure does not take into account the focal participant's perceptual evaluation of his/her teammates' LMX. Since the previous studies showed that there are other levels of LMX explaining additional variance in employee outcomes above that of LMX alone (e.g., Harris, Li, & Kirkman, 2014), therefore in this study by controlling for these two constructs we aim to clarify the effect of RLMX perception of the focal employee. In other words, in order to determine whether RLMX perception had effects on relative deprivation above

LMX quality, as well as above traditionally-measured RLMX, we controlled for follower ratings of overall LMX, and objective RLMX composed by integrating all team members' perspectives. Accordingly, when controlled for these two constructs, it is found that the direction and strength of the analysis results regarding the effects of RLMX perception did not change. Therefore, these constructs were also excluded from subsequent analyses in the interest of simplicity and parsimony (Becker et al., 2015).

Analytical Strategy

Due to the nested structure of our data (employees nested in teams), we conducted multilevel analyses using MLwiN software to test our proposed hypotheses (Rasbash et al., 2000). To determine whether multilevel analysis was appropriate, we calculated the intra-class correlation coefficient ICC1 for our outcome variables. The results were affective commitment: 9%; OCB:16%; and intention to quit: 15%. These results justify the use of multi-level analyses.

We used the Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (MCMAM) to test our indirect effects. This method uses simulations with 20,000 iterations and relies on a product-of-coefficients (ab) approach (MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009). The advantage of this method is that it draws randomly from the joint distributions of the parameter estimates, calculates the product value of the two parameter estimates and repeats this process a large number of times. In the end, a confidence interval is estimated to test indirect effects (Bauer et al., 2006). When the confidence intervals do not contain zero, this means an indirect effect is established. We used an online tool developed by Selig and Preacher (2008) to calculate confidence intervals, and tested our moderation hypotheses following recommended procedures (Aiken & West, 1991).

Results

Table 1 depicts the mean, standard deviation values, correlations and internal reliability values of the study constructs.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

By using M-Plus version 8, and utilizing the latent variables of constructs, we conducted a series of CFAs in order to determine if the measurement model had the best fit to the data and supports the convergent validity of our study variables. As shown in Table 2, the measurement model had the best fit to the data and supports the convergent validity of the variables of the study. Hence, we started testing the hypotheses of the study.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 1 proposed that RLMX perception is negatively associated with relative deprivation. Results from multi-level analyses revealed that this association is significant and in the expected

direction. This hypothesis was supported ($\gamma = -0.58, p < 0.001$). As perceptions of RLMX increase, employees feel less deprived.

Hypothesis 2 proposes the moderation of independent self-construal on the negative association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation. The interaction term was significant, offering initial support for this hypothesis ($\gamma = -0.22, p < 0.05$). The results show that independent self-construal weaken this negative association between RLMX and the relative deprivation ($\beta = -.24, S.E. = .09, p < .05$). We displayed the moderation effect in Figure 2. We conducted a slope test to show the significant interaction effect for different values of the moderator (Preacher et al., 2006). For a higher independent self-construal (i.e., one SD above the mean), the association is statistically significant and negative ($\beta = -.71, S.E. = .07, p < .001$). This association is still statistically significant and negative when independent self-construal is medium and low ($\beta = -.56, S.E. = .05, p < .001$; $\beta = -.41, S.E. = .09, p < .001$, respectively). This finding suggests that for these individuals low on independent self-construal, enjoying lower extent of RLMX still makes them feel relatively deprived but the intensity and strength of this feeling is less in comparison to individuals with high independent self-construals.

Hypothesis 3 concerns the moderation of interdependent self-construal on the negative association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation. The interaction term was significant, offering initial support for this hypothesis ($\gamma = 0.37, p < 0.01$). As we did for hypothesis 2, to interpret the strength of moderation, we plotted the interaction at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator value. As can be seen in Figure 3, for employees who are higher on interdependent self-construal (i.e., one SD above the mean), the association is statistically significant and less negative ($\beta = -.35, S.E. = .06, p < .001$). This association is still statistically significant and negative when interdependent self-construal is medium and low ($\beta = -.56, S.E. = .05, p < .001$; $\beta = -.35, S.E. = .06, p < .001$, respectively).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 4 proposes that feelings of relative deprivation mediate the association between RLMX perception and affective commitment to the organization. The confidence interval did not include the value of zero, thus supporting our hypothesis (95% CI = [0.04/0.14]). This means that the negative impact of feeling deprived that emanates from RLMX impacts on and shapes how employees make sense of and react to affective commitment sense of their organization. Feeling of relative deprivation acts as a mediating mechanisms and bridge between RLMX and affective commitment of employees.

Hypothesis 5 proposes that feelings of relative deprivation mediate the association between RLMX perception and intention to leave the organization. The confidence interval did not include the value of zero (95% CI = [0.32/0.38]), thus supporting hypothesis 5. In line with our expectations, this finding suggests that those employees who feel relatively deprived as a result of their RLMX

relationships also show tendencies of leaving their organization. Similar to hypothesis 4, our findings underlined the bridging and mediating role of feelings of relative deprivation between RLMX and intention to quit organization.

Finally, hypothesis 6 proposes that feelings of relative deprivation mediate the association between RLMX perception and OCB. The confidence interval did not include the value of zero (95% CI = [0.17/0.29]), thus supporting hypothesis 6. Similar our explanations above, our findings demonstrated that feeling deprived negatively impacts on employee outcomes and specific to this hypothesis, the findings underlined the mediating role of feeling of relative deprivation between RLMX and OCB. Please see Table 4 for details.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Common Method Bias

Since all the data for the independent variable and the mediator were collected from the same source at one time, the items of these constructs were assessed for the existence of common method bias (CMB). We implemented the following design-related steps to deal with the limitations of cross-sectional study design, and so to reduce potential CMB (e.g. Podsakoff, et al., 2003). First, the findings from our study revealed two significant interaction effects between variables rated by subordinates, which is challenging to detect in datasets that have common source bias issues (Siemsen et al., 2010). Second, we assured participants that their responses would be treated confidentially, used randomized items within question blocks, separated independent and moderator variables in the survey, and used different response scales for different variables to minimize CMB in the design of our study (e.g. Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, in line with suggestions (Podsakoff et al., 2012) and recent research (e.g., Bal et al., 2012), we conducted a marker-variable analysis (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). We did this by subtracting the lowest positive correlation between self-report variables which can be considered a proxy for common method bias, from each correlation value. Each of these values was then divided by 1 – the lowest positive correlation between self-report variables. The resulting correlation values reflect CMB-adjusted correlations. Large differences between the unadjusted and CMB-adjusted correlations suggest that CMB is a problem. The absolute differences were relatively minimal in our sample, ranging between 0.002 and 0.001. Furthermore, and in line with the recommended procedures (e.g., Kock, 2015) we calculated the Variance Inflation Index (i.e., VIF) values for the constructs of our proposed conceptual model. The results demonstrated that values were closer to 1 (on a range between 1 – 5) indicating that collinearity and CMB were not significant issues of our dataset. In addition, Harman’s single-factor test was conducted to examine whether the CMB is a major concern in this paper (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results indicated that the first main factor only explained 19.36% of the total variance, which is below the recommended threshold value (< 50%) (Saris & Gallhofer, 2014). Therefore, the result reinforces that the CMB issue is not significant in this dataset. Further details can be provided upon request. Hence, from this perspective, it can be concluded that CMB was not an issue in our analyses.

Robustness Checks

To check the robustness of the model, we further tested three alternative models. Firstly, we reversed the order of variables, such that relative deprivation feeling served as the antecedent of our proposed association (Alternative Model 1). Secondly, we treated self-construal as antecedent to

predict RLMX, relative deprivation feeling, and the three outcomes sequentially (Alternative Model 2). Thirdly, we tested the second stage interaction effect of self-construal (Alternative Model 3). In these three alternative models, we have controlled the effects of perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and future expectations. To test these alternative models, we conducted structural equation modelling (SEM) with path analyses in Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2019), which allow us to simultaneously estimate all path coefficients in the models. Specifically, to test the interaction effects in alternative model 1 and 3, we adopted the simple slope method. In alternative model 2, the mediation analysis was based on 5000 bootstrapping cases. The results of our analyses revealed that among the alternative models tested, our proposed conceptual model had the best fit with the data. Further details can be provided upon request.

Discussion

Integrating SCT and the premises of relative deprivation, this study developed and tested a model of the way in which RLMX perception mediates employees' affective commitment to the organization, intention to leave the organization, and OCB via its influence on employees' feelings of relative deprivation. Further, we expanded this model by incorporating the roles of independent and interdependent self-construal as boundary conditions moderating the strength of the mediated relationship.

The results of our analyses support the hypothesized relationships in our research model, and point to three important findings. First, we found RLMX perception to be negatively associated with the feeling of relative deprivation. Second, we found that relative deprivation mediates the link between RLMX perception and the employee outcomes of affective commitment to the organization, intention to leave the organization, and OCB. Third, we found that self-construal moderates the negative relationship between RLMX perception and relative deprivation, strengthening it for employees with higher independent self-construal and lower interdependent self-construal, and weakening it for employees with higher interdependent self-construal and lower independent self-construal.

Theoretical Contributions

The study makes a number of contributions to research on and understanding of RLMX. The first has to do with conceptualization and development of the concept of RLMX. The theory that underlines that LMX relationships is embedded in the context of wider relational dynamics (Sparowe & Liden, 1997), but most of the studies to date have explored LMX as if it existed in isolation (Anand et al., 2016). Social context lies at the core of LMX, and we have confirmed and illustrated this by demonstrating that comparison with other members of the work group acts as a frame of reference in defining a member's relationship with the leader via the effect of personal disposition captured through the two distinct self-construal dimensions of independent-self and interdependent-self. The current study, along with work on LMX differentiation (e.g., Henderson et al., 2009), social comparisons in work-context (e.g., Hu & Liden, 2013) and the effects of them on employee outcomes (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2010), adds to the growing body of research that explores the construct of LMX in its social context. By focusing on the focal employee's RLMX perception, and controlling for the impact of traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members, our findings serve the core tenet of LMX which holds that both subjective perception and objective context are critical to viewing and making sense of employees' affective reactions. This adds to the growing line of research which aims to clarify the constructs of LMX and RLMX.

A second contribution of the study is its focus on relative deprivation and its integration with the LMX and RLMX literature. Latest research on RLMX and LMX differentiation highlight that those who are left out of the close circles of leaders tend to react negatively by showing negative emotions, one key of them being relative deprivation (Vidyarthi et al., 2014). Our findings enrich the premises of relative deprivation by exploring the feelings of deprivation emanating from RLMX, a novel and new construct in the LMX literature, and by exploring the impact on employee outcomes in an under-studied context of service industry in Turkey (Smith et al., 2012). Prior research has shown that lacking key resources from leaders may negatively impact on employee attitudes and behaviors (Dulebohn et al., 2012). This research has shown how a positive leader-member relationship, and the resulting employee feeling of having access to an abundance of resources and work opportunities, can strengthen employee identification with the organization and lead to increased affective commitment to the organization, lower intention to leave, and more positive OCB. Our results revealed that feelings of relative deprivation is a novel mechanism that help untap how and why enjoying high quality relationship with one's leader (in relative terms to others) shape key attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. This can be considered an important theoretical extension of LMX literature which has predominantly relied on the frameworks of social exchange and perceived support and liking, which underlie the norm of reciprocity; in such that, shifts the attention to the importance of social perception and boundary conditions (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2016). Moreover, our focus on relative deprivation can also be considered as a response to the calls for future research that Hu and Liden (2013) and Greenberg and colleagues (2007) made in their work: In essence our work underlines that relative deprivation offers an appropriate justification to explain how and why RLMX may impact on employee's key outcomes.

A third contribution of study lies in its focus on exploring the moderating role of contextual conditions with respect to the impact of RLMX: Our findings highlighted the importance of exploring individual dispositions of independent versus interdependent self-construal. Our findings demonstrated that the association between RLMX and feelings of relative deprivation is not linear. These associations depend on the nature and characteristics of individuals. For employees who are driven by the individualistic values of self-achievement, success, and competition, resources and support beyond the minimum level required for work are key requirements for their need fulfillment. The findings offer support for this theoretical proposition showing that individuals who score high on "independent self-construal" tend to react more negatively when they are deprived of resources and support from their leaders—that is, they feel greater relative deprivation—. Further, their feelings of higher relative deprivation negatively influence their work attitudes (affective commitment to the organization and intention to leave the organization) and OCB. In contrast, our research shows that employees who highly value teamwork, harmony, and collaboration—i.e., those who rate high on "interdependent self-construal"—feel less deprived when they perceive that their RLMX is low, and therefore react less negatively in terms of work attitudes and OCB. By focusing on this individual-level boundary condition, we have expanded the relational context within which the impact of RLMX perception unfolds beyond the dyad of leader to include an element of social comparison with peers and colleagues. This triadic view that encompasses focal employee, leaders and co-workers embodies a richer understanding of RLMX and its effect on employee attitudes and behavior: while perceptions of the context and team are important (Hu & Liden, 2013), employees' individual dispositions also influence how they view their relationships with the leader and their standing in the work group (Anand et al., 2014). Furthermore, our findings highlight the very important role that individual dispositions are grounded in their dominant identification needs—for social acceptance or achievement (Markus & Kitayama, 1991)—which give shape to their self-construal and which therefore can be considered as an important addition to social identity literature.

Finally, the majority of research studies on LMX have focused on contextual variables at the team level (e.g., team identification; Hu & Liden, 2013), task level (e.g., task interdependence; Liden et al., 2006), or relational level (e.g., leader-leader exchange; Herdman et al., 2017). While not undervaluing the importance of these variables, we believe that our focus on the individual and on dispositional variables sheds additional and valuable light on how RLMX perception and social comparison unfold for each employee.

Practical Implications

Globalization has become the new feature of today's competitive work settings. In today's world, labor markets are not local anymore; but global. Companies are recruiting from all over the world rather than relying on their local region as before. Individuals are also preferring considering better employment alternatives regardless of location. As a result, organizations have become multi-cultural settings. Having employees with various cultural backgrounds have directed companies to develop more customized management and HR practices to meet employees' diverse perspectives. In view of that, HR managers and executives also need to adequately consider the variation of employees' self-construal within organizations as a result of the increased diversity within companies. In relation to the growth of globalization and the context of our findings in relation to self-construal, global service companies are recommended to focus on understanding and developing interventions around employee self-construal.

In consideration for entry level interventions, HR managers and executives may sketch their considerations for the roles of employees' dispositions of interdependent versus independent self-construal within group-based work. Especially in service context, formation of workgroups is likely to be influential on service performance by providing the main interaction context. Therefore, understanding individual dispositions to be influential on workgroup relations may help to guide carefully selecting group members for different workgroups.

As previous research has demonstrated, followers tend to be more willing to reciprocate when they perceive that they have a high-quality relationship with their leader and when they perceive the leader-follower relationship to be important. Leaders should therefore be aware that the norm of reciprocity may vary depending on how important a follower perceives the relationship to be, and they may need to find other ways to motivate employees who do not see the relationship as important. Efforts by leaders to build positive relationships with employees who value LMX quality may result in positive reciprocal outcomes. But in the case of employees who do not see the leader-follower relationship as important, reciprocity-contingent influence tactics are not likely to be effective. The current study suggests that acknowledgement of the fact that followers vary in the extent of the levels to which they perceive their relationship with the leader to be important; and that paying attention to the self-construal of the employee, which drives such perception, can help guide the management of workgroups and the design of interventions in a way that would promote team cohesion and mitigate feelings of deprivation on the part of team members. Considering that there are possible ways by which leaders can prevent differentiated relations with subordinates from harming group cohesion and development (Liden et al., 2006), there are also intervention alternatives to be designed and implemented by HR managers and executives at different phases of the employment process for mitigating the negative consequences of RLMX perceptions influenced by employees' dispositional factors.

From this angle, for practical implications this study offers a platform for considering and introducing individual-level interventions by HR managers and executives during employee recruitment or in the later stages of employee socialization and integration. One such perspective

brings us to advise HR managers to formularize treatments for raising employees' awareness on the importance of relationship building both with their managers and colleagues, so that they would feel more responsible for their relations and so try to show more effort for them. In that, employees' awareness for their personal responsibility in work relations and their increased effort on this perspective may help them to feel less deprived by feeling that they are also influential on the future of their relations. Previous research suggests that raising awareness is one of the important ways of reducing the impact of misperceptions and misinterpretations (Russo & Shoemaker, 2001). Workshops and video training could demonstrate how it is important to establish meaningful relationships with their managers. Such programs can effectively complement frame-of-reference trainings discussed in the appraisal literature that seek to achieve consistent results and principles in developing favorable perceptions of employee – leader relationship quality (Roch, et al., 2012).

As another intervention, supervisors and HR managers can invest in their employees' skills and capabilities to ensure that they are equipped with the required personal resources, so that they do not feel deprived of support and can access necessary resources to perform their tasks and demonstrate commitment toward their organization. Previous research shows that having soft-skills, such as political skill, help employees to deal with the drawbacks of work relationships especially the one with leader (Epitropaki et al., 2016). While training programs and personal development workshops help to support employees on building necessary skills; another important way of achieving this target is via implementing periodic interventions to evaluate employees' feelings and their work experiences (e.g., van Wingerden et al., 2016). Furthermore, face-to-face workshops, delivered by HR executives and senior managers to bring attention to the psychological resources that employees should consider are likely to have positive impact over the long run (Kelly, et al., 2020).

Strengths, limitations, and future directions

The strengths of our study include its multi-level nature, which takes into account team dynamics and integrates relative deprivation into organizational-level study, and the introduction of the unexplored boundary condition of self-construal to LMX research.

Along with these strengths, this study also has limitations. For one, its cross-sectional data collection does not reflect a longitudinal perspective. To build on the current findings, future studies may consider adding time-lagged intervals to the research design in order to investigate how the causal claims of RLMX would unfold over time. A second limitation of our research is the sample size, which is relatively small to achieve generalizable results. Future research is recommended to utilize a higher sample size to achieve its intended results. A third limitation is the cultural context within which the data of this study are collected (Turkey). Relational dynamics and societal expectations in Turkey may have influenced the dynamics and directions of proposed associations in our conceptual model. We suggest future research to consider the potential impact of cross-cultural variability. A further limitation is that in developing our proposed associations, some of the underlying assumptions have not been empirically collected and tested with related constructs (e.g., omitted variables). Future research is suggested to develop a more-fined model to include and test all the assumptions.

Another promising direction for future research is further dissect the context and/or the boundary conditions under which RLMX influences the social comparison processes that ultimately affect individual attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Given that the central premise of LMX is that leaders differentiate among their work group members (Liden et al., 2006), substantial variance in RLMX seems to be a fact in teams.

A further avenue of research could be to explore team-level outcomes in addition to individual-level outcomes. It may be that individuals can experience relative deprivation without this negatively affecting their engagement with and support of their team. Erdogan and Bauer (2010) found that team-level perceptions of justice may mediate the reactions of co-workers in such a way that, when team members believe team-level fairness to be high, they are less likely to react negatively. Future studies exploring justice and team-level outcomes would be valuable.

Our study relied on social comparison processes, but did not test some of the assumptions underlying those processes, such as upward and downward social comparisons and the resulting emotional reactions. Another promising avenue of research is to delineate the direction and strength of the social comparisons (Brown et al., 2007). As Goodman and Haisley (2007) indicate, the existing literature pays little attention to the question of what kinds of referents employees use for social comparison of LMX in the organizational context and why; more research on this topic is encouraged. Related to this point, exploration of the role that other discrete emotions, besides relative deprivation, play in reactions to perception of low RLMX would also be a promising research direction.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data and the corresponding analysis that support the findings of this study are available from the second author upon reasonable request.

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Figure 1. Conceptual model.

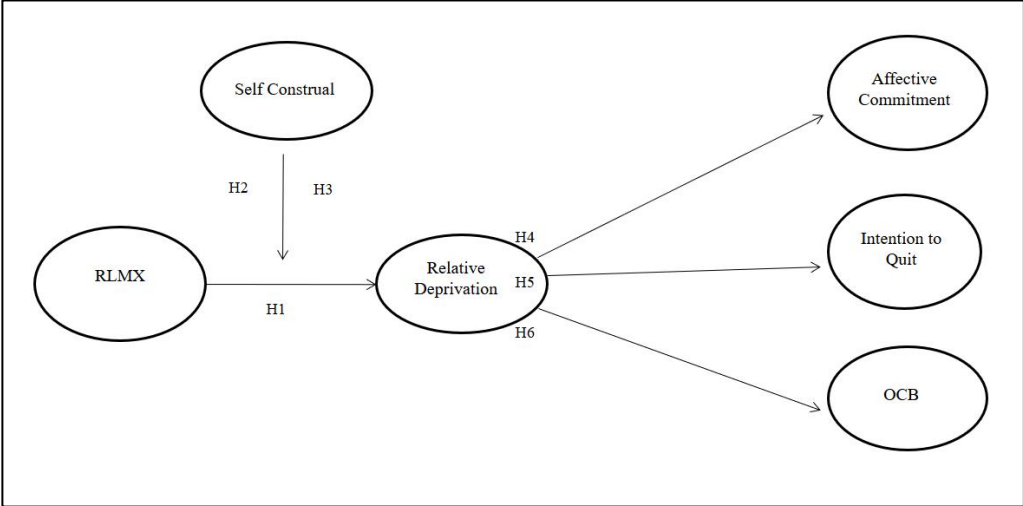


Figure 2. Moderation of *independent* self-construal on association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation.

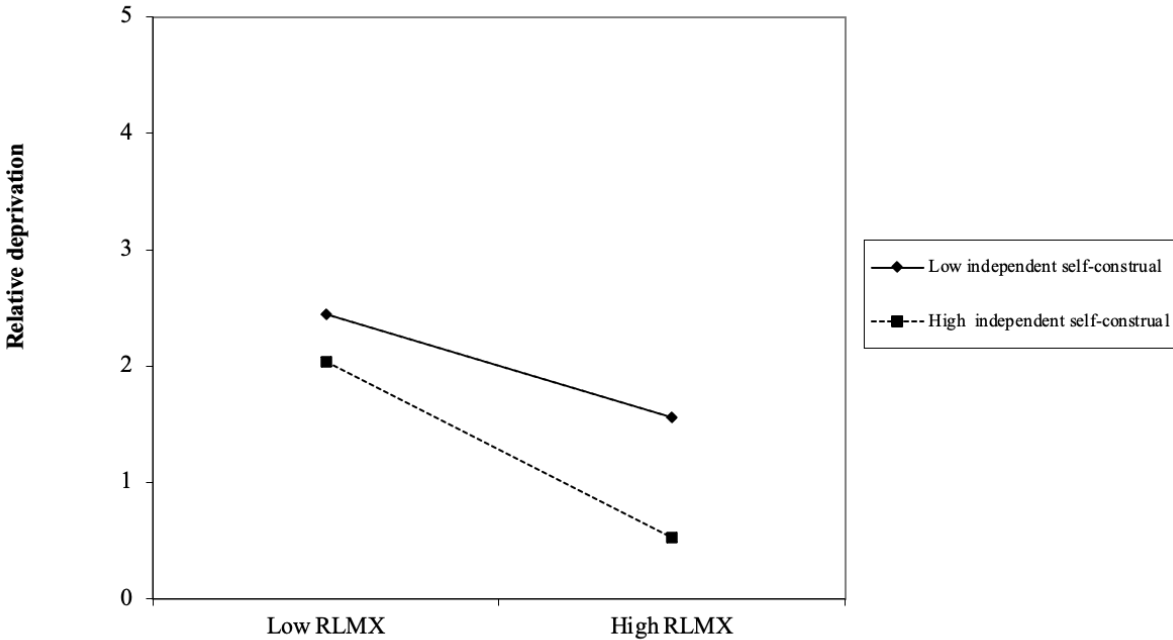


Figure 3. Moderation of *interdependent* self-construal on association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation.

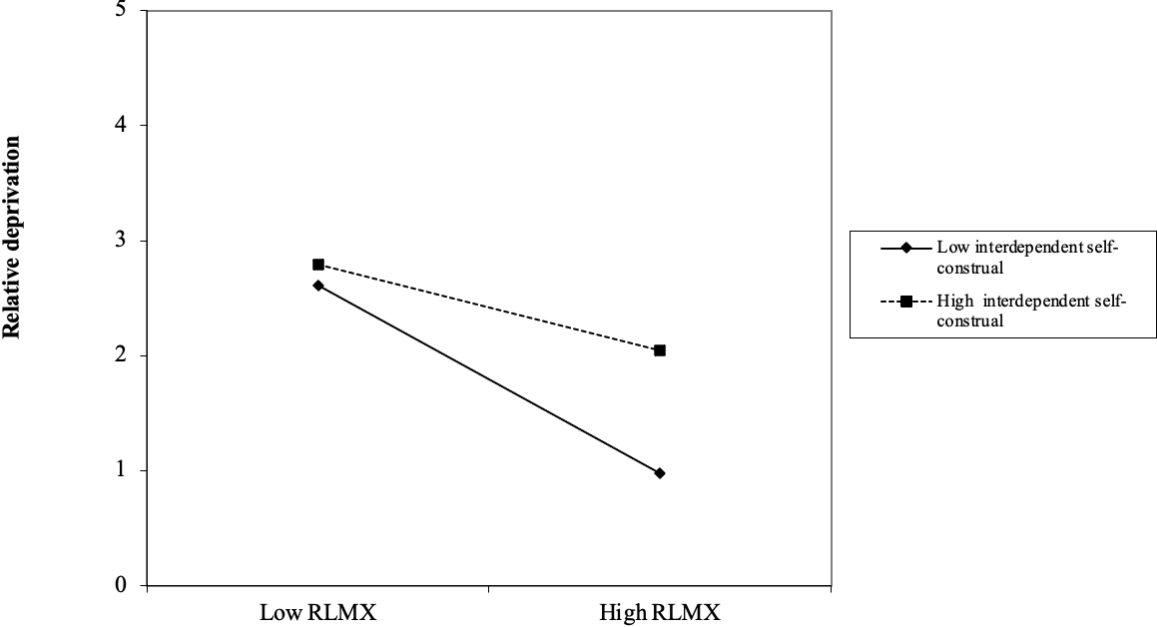


Table 1. Means, standard deviation, correlations, and internal reliability values.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 RLMX Perception	0.005	0.62	N.A.						
2 Relative Deprivation	2.36	0.71	-0.53**	(0.88)					
3 Independent Self-Construal	3.72	0.61	0.26**	-0.12	(0.83)				
4 Interdependent Self-Construal	3.61	0.63	0.002	-0.27**	-0.32**	(0.84)			
5 OCB	3.69	0.67	0.34**	-0.52**	0.16**	0.19**	(0.87)		
6 Affective Commitment	3.32	0.57	0.25**	-0.26**	0.22**	0.18**	0.43**	(0.89)	
7 Intention to Quit	2.21	0.95	-0.27**	0.38**	-0.12	-0.15**	-0.45**	-0.44**	(0.91)

Note 1: In our analyses, we controlled for various demographic variables including the age, gender, and tenure of the focal employees, the industry they work in, and their educational background. The direction and the strength of our results did not change; hence these variables were excluded from subsequent analyses (Becker et al., 2015). Furthermore, to test the incremental validity of our findings, we controlled for two constructs: individual-level LMX quality and traditionally-measured RLMX reflecting the perceptions of all group members. Accordingly, when controlled for these two constructs, it is found that the direction and strength of the analysis results regarding the effects of RLMX perception did not change. Therefore, these constructs were also excluded from subsequent analyses in the interest of simplicity and parsimony (Becker et al., 2015).

Note 2: Reliabilities indicated along the diagonal in parentheses.

Note 3: N = 271 employees nested in 65 work units.

* p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 2. CFA Comparison of Study Variables

<i>Models</i>	<i>Model description</i>	χ^2 (<i>df</i>)	$\Delta \chi^2$ (Δ <i>df</i>)	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>
6-factor	All 6 factors (Measurement Model)	2060 (1209)		0.86	0.85	0.051	0.057
5-factor	Independent self and Interdependent self were combined as one factor	2538 (1214)	478 (5)	0.78	0.77	0.063	0.09
5-factor	Organization citizenship behaviour and Affective commitment were combined as one factor	2567 (1214)	29 (0)	0.78	0.77	0.064	0.073

Table 3. The Results of H1, H2, and H3.

Variables	Dependent Variable: Relative Deprivation (H1)			Dependent Variable: Relative Deprivation (H2)			Dependent Variable: Relative Deprivation (H3)		
	Model 1			Model 1			Model 1		
	Estimates	SE	t	Estimates	SE	t	Estimates	SE	t
Intercept	2.34	0.04	58	2.35	0.05	47	2.33	0.04	58.25
RLMX perception	-0.58	0.06	8.50***	-0.52	0.05	-10.40***	-0.57	0.05	11.40***
Independent self-construal				0.02	0.06	0.33**			
Interdependent self-construal							-0.26	0.05	-5.20***
RLMX perception * Independent self-construal				-0.22	0.09	-2.44*			
RLMX perception * Interdependent self-construal							0.37	0.08	4.62***
Level 1 intercept variance (SE)	0.06	0.02		0.07	0.03		0.05	0.04	
Level 2 intercept variance (SE)	0.29	0.01		0.31	0.04		0.25	0.05	

Note: N = 271 employees nested in 65 work units.

* p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 4. The Results of H4, H5, and H6.

Variables	Dependent Variable: Relative Deprivation			Dependent Variable: OCB			Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment			Dependent Variable: Intention to Quit		
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 2			Model 2		
	Estimates	SE	t	Estimates	SE	t	Estimates	SE	t	Estimates	SE	t
Intercept	2.32	0.04	58	3.71	0.04	92.75	3.31	0.04	82.75	2.22	0.07	31.71
RLMX perception	-0.58	0.06	-8.50***	0.04	0.06	0.66	0.03	0.06	0.50	0.01	0.09	0.11
Relative deprivation				-0.41	0.06	-6.83***	-0.12	0.06	-2.00*	0.43	0.09	4.77***
Level 1 intercept variance (SE)	0.06	0.02		0.06	0.04		0.03	0.04		0.15	0.06	
Level 2 intercept variance (SE)	0.29	0.01		0.26	0.03		0.26	0.03		0.61	0.04	

Note: N = 271 employees nested in 65 work units.

The indirect effect was calculated using an online interactive tool that generates an R score (<http://quantpsy.org/medmc/medmc.htm>). The first path of the indirect relationship relates to the association between RLMX perception and relative deprivation (-0.58; 0.06). The second path of the indirect relationship relates to the association between relative deprivation and OCB (-0.41; 0.06), affective commitment (-0.12; 0.06), and intention to quit (0.43; 0.09) when RLMX perception is present in the equation.

* p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Appendix

The standardized factor loadings of scale items

Organization Citizenship Behavior (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87

Provide constructive suggestions about how the crew can improve its effectiveness (0.72)

Encourage the crew member when he/she is down (0.70)

Willingly share his/her expertise with other members of the crew (0.69)

Take steps to try to prevent problems with other crew members (0.69)

Helps others out if someone falls behind in his/her work (0.68)

'Touch base' with other crew members before initiating actions that might (0.68)

Intentions to Quit (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.91

I am actively looking for a job outside my company (0.86)

As soon as I can find a better job, I will leave my company (0.81)

I am seriously thinking about quitting my job (0.81)

I often think about quitting my job at this company (0.80)

I think I will be working at this company five years from now (R) (0.78)

Affective Commitment to Organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.89

I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization (0.72)

I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it (0.71)

I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own (0.70)

I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one (R) (0.69)

I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization (R) (0.69)

I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization (R) (0.68)

This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me (0.67)

I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (R) (0.67)

Relative Deprivation (Tougas et al., 2004); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88

(C1) Do you feel that you are less appreciated than others by your immediate supervisor?

(A1) To what extent are you satisfied with this situation (R) (0.62)

(C2) Do you have the impression that your work evaluated less than others' by your immediate supervisor?

(A2) To what extent are you satisfied with this situation (R) (0.59)

(C3) Do you feel that you have offered fewer opportunities than others by your immediate supervisor?

(A3) To what extent are you satisfied with this situation (R) (0.58)

(C4) Do you feel that other employees can deprive your position of you?

(A4) To what extent are you satisfied with this situation (R) (0.57)

Leader-member exchange (Liden & Maslyn, 1998); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87

I like my supervisor very much as a person (0.73)

My supervisor is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend (0.73)

My supervisor is a lot of fun to work with (0.72)

My supervisor defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue (0.70)

My supervisor would come to my defense if I were "attacked" by others (0.69)

My supervisor would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake (0.68)

I do work for my supervisor that goes beyond what is specified in my job description (0.67)

I am willing to put extra effort, beyond that normally required, to meet my supervisor's work goals (0.67)

I do not mind working my hardest for my supervisor (0.66)

I am impressed with my supervisor's knowledge of his/her job (0.65)

I respect my supervisor's knowledge of and competence on the job (0.65)

I admire my supervisor's professional skills (0.63)

Interdependent Self-Construal (Singelis, 1994); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84

- I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact (0.72)
- It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group (0.71)
- My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me (0.70)
- I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor (0.70)
- I respect people who are modest about themselves (0.69)
- I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in (0.69)
- I often have feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my accomplishments (0.68)
- I should take into consideration my parents' advice when making education/career plans (0.67)
- It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group (0.66)
- I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I'm not happy with the group (0.66)
- If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible (0.55)
- Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument (0.55)

Independent Self-Construal (Singelis, 1994); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.83

- I'd rather say "No" directly, than risk being misunderstood (0.73)
- Speaking up during a class (or in public) is not a problem for me (0.72)
- Having a lively imagination is important to me (0.71)
- I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards (0.70)
- I am the same person at home that I am at school(job) (0.69)
- Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me (0.68)
- I act the same way no matter who I am with (0.67)
- I feel comfortable using someone's first name soon after I meet, even when they are older than I am (0.67)
- I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met (0.66)
- I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects (0.65)
- My personal identity independent of others is very important to me (0.59)
- I value being in good health above everything (0.58)