



LMX TRANSFORMATION: THE SUPERVISORY JUSTICE MEDIATED MODEL

Shingirayi M. Mushonga

Associate Professor of Management
Department of Management and Marketing
College of Business
Coppin State University
2500 West North Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21216, USA
smushonga@coppin.edu

Abstract

Leader-member exchange is one of the most notable and dominant theories in leadership research; however, studies examining the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and justice have yielded mixed results. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to further explore this relationship and provide some clarity by examining the mediating effects of supervisory justice on the relationship between LMX and employee work outcomes (i.e., task performance, job satisfaction, and trust). The inclusion of supervisory justice as a mediator in this relationship advances our understanding of the direct processes through which a supervisor can elicit positive work outcomes in LMX relationships. Data was collected from 144 participants employed at a non-profit, agricultural organization that provides financial and technical assistance to small rural farmers in Zimbabwe. Using the mediation guidelines provided by Baron and Kenny (1986), results showed that supervisory justice mediated the relationship between LMX and task performance, job satisfaction, and trust. This study's findings illustrate the vital role supervisory justice plays in maintaining both high- and low-quality LMX exchanges. Furthermore, findings suggest supervisory justice can transform low-quality LMX exchanges into high-quality ones. Study limitations, implications, and direction for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Leader-member exchange (LMX), supervisory justice, social exchange theory, task performance, job satisfaction, trust



INTRODUCTION

Leader-member exchange is one of the most notable and dominant theories in leadership research. Numerous studies have found LMX to have strong predictive power in organizations and serve as an efficacious tool in understanding organizational outcomes (Bowler et al., 2019; Colquitt et al., 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2002; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Martin et al., 2016; Muldoon et al., 2018; Park et al., 2015; Rockstuhl et al., 2012; Scandura, 1999). The plethora of research that has examined numerous LMX antecedents and consequences from different contexts is well documented (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liao & Hui, 2021; Martin et al., 2016). One LMX antecedent that is central to our understanding of how and why LMX relationships transpires is justice, which has recently garnered a lot of attention within LMX research (Ali et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2020; Liao & Hui, 2021; Ionescu & Iliescu, 2021; Park et al., 2015; Reb et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2019). Interestingly, the relationship between LMX and justice is complex because justice has been noted in previous research as an antecedent (Colquitt et al., 2013) and as a consequence (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Justice has been examined in the LMX context based on two justice sources: the organization (organizational justice) and the supervisor (supervisory justice).

Notwithstanding the extensive research on the relationship between LMX and justice, there still exists some ambiguity that needs to be further examined. For example, Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) noted in their study that supervisors can only develop a few high-quality LMX exchanges with their subordinates. However, a limited number of studies have endeavored to support or refute this assumption. Furthermore, Erdogan & Bauer's (2014) review of LMX literature called for future research to address why some relationships may never mature into high-quality LMX exchanges, yet this challenge has also largely gone unrequited. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the intricate relationship between LMX and supervisory justice in an effort to address some of the unresolved issues within the LMX literature. More specifically, this study examined the mediating role of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and work outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Social exchange theory (SET) is a prominent conceptual framework often used to analyze leader-subordinate relationships that are predicated on a series of transactions, ultimately, fostering a sense of obligation among subordinates (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET is rooted in the norm of reciprocity, which emphasizes a need for individuals to repay others for receiving tangible or intangible rewards, thus determining their

willingness to reciprocate (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1961). In other words, social exchanges are considered as a form of currency in the workplace wherein one's behaviors are contingent upon the types of rewards or benefits received. Therefore, the quality of such exchanges set the tone for the type of relationships experienced between leaders and their subordinates (Blau, 1964). For example, leaders may display either positive or negative initiating actions towards their subordinates. Positive initiating actions encompass behaviors such as displaying fairness (justice) or providing organizational support, whereas negative initiating actions include displaying abusive behavior, bullying, or rudeness towards their subordinates (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Subsequently, subordinates will counter with reciprocating responses (e.g., relational and behavioral) that often reflect the type of initiating actions displayed from their leader (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Leadership research has consistently shown that the quality of relationships matters within the workplace, further drawing attention to the social exchange process and its impact on work outcomes (Cropanzano et al., 2002; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Leader-member exchange (LMX) suggests that “dyadic relationships and work roles are developed and negotiated over time through a series of exchanges...between leader and member” (Bauer & Green 1996, p. 1538). LMX focuses on the quality of established relationships between leaders and their subordinates based on their interactions, which can vary between low- and high-quality (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Although leader-subordinate relationships often begin through a transactional process, which is characteristic of low-quality LMX relationships, they have the capacity to transform into high-quality LMX relationships centered on mutual liking, respect, and trust (Liden & Graen, 1980). However, Erdogan and Bauer (2014) suggest these transformations are rare and complex due to variations in leader and member behaviors, personality characteristics, and contextual characteristics (e.g., culture, sectors, or group size). The quality of leader-subordinate relationships is vital to subordinates accessing resources within the workplace, which tend to be limited in nature. Ultimately, leaders determine how these resources are distributed amongst subordinates, making it more of a selective process. Therefore, subordinates experiencing high-quality LMX relationships with their leader have an increased likelihood of accessing resources due to preferential treatment from their leader. As such, some subordinates will be relegated to the out-group that is characterized by low levels of trust, support, interactions and rewards (e.g., low-quality LMX exchanges), whereas others are considered as belonging to the in-group where high levels of trust, support, interaction, and rewards exist (e.g., high-quality LMX exchanges; Linden & Graen, 1980).

Compared to out-group members, in-group members are more likely to perceive their relationship with their leader as contributing to work-related benefits, so they are willing to assume additional responsibilities and go the extra mile for their leader (Bowler et al., 2010; Liden & Graen, 1980). Subsequently, studies show that high-quality LMX relationships are associated with positive outcomes, such as increased task performance, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), job commitment, and lower rates of turnover (Bowler et al., 2019; Colquitt et al., 2001; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Muldoon et al., 2018), further highlighting the significance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace and their impact on broader organizational outcomes.

Supervisory Justice

Contrary to organizational justice, supervisory justice places emphasis on the supervisor serving as the direct source of justice (Byrne, 1999; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002); therefore, subordinates may harbor conflicting views of their organization and supervisor. Consequently, extant literature underscores the importance of the supervisor's role and their ability to influence subordinates' perceptions of fairness in the workplace (Malatesta and Byrne, 1997; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002). Despite serving as proxies for their organization, supervisors are also viewed as independent entities due to their discretionary nature in two key justice dimensions: procedural and interactional justice (Byrne, 1999; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002), which jointly constitute supervisory justice. On one hand, discretion among supervisors can occur in the implementation of organizational policies and procedures, as well as decision-making abilities, consequently shaping subordinates' fairness perceptions of these processes, also known as supervisory procedural justice (SPJ; Yang et al., 2009). Generally, subordinates are more likely to possess favorable attitudes towards supervisors deemed as transparent and fair. Hence, SPJ has become a central conversation in the justice literature, more specifically, since it is associated with positive outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, trust, and task performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2012; Malatesta & Byrne, 1997; Mushonga et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009).

Alternatively, supervisors can also display discretion in the treatment of their subordinates and the manner in which they disseminate information, thus impacting subordinates' fairness perceptions, also known as supervisory interactional justice (SIJ; Bies and Moag, 1986; Byrne, 1999). SIJ is comprised of interpersonal and informational dimensions of justice (Colquitt et al., 2001) and gauges the extent to which supervisors display respect, dignity, and politeness towards subordinates in their interactions. SIJ has been shown to significantly affect supervisory justice perceptions, in part, due to the frequency of their

interactions with subordinates (Colquitt et al., 2001; Holtz & Harold, 2009) and possessing more autonomy in this dimension which is less prescriptive than other dimensions of justice (Scott et al., 2009; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Thus, the quality of interpersonal treatment between the supervisor and subordinate serves as a basis for subordinates establishing fairness perceptions (Colquitt et al., 2001). Similar to SPJ, previous research shows that SIJ is linked to increased levels of OCB, job satisfaction (Cropanzano et al., 2002; Liao & Rupp, 2005), trust (Kernan & Hanges, 2002), and task performance (Mushonga et al., 2014). Collectively, higher levels of supervisory justice emanate from subordinates experiencing increased levels of fairness in decision-making processes and experiencing positive interactions with their supervisors.

Hypotheses Development

Previous research has well-documented the link between LMX and its influence on work outcomes, such as task performance, job satisfaction, and trust (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Mushonga et al., 2014). Subordinates receiving rewards (e.g., verbal recognition, social support, salary increase, etc.) from their supervisor are more likely to possess more favorable attitudes towards them.

LMX and Task Performance

Task performance matters to the success of both organizations and the employees; therefore, it has garnered unprecedented attention in the leadership literature (Colquitt et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2016). Task performance is considered as “a group of behaviors involved in the completion of tasks...includes behaviors that contribute to the production of a good or the provision of a service” (Martin et al., 2016, p. 67). In other words, task performance focuses on ‘how much one produces and ‘how well one performs’ in relation to their job responsibilities. More importantly, these behaviors are evaluative in nature, yielding positive or negative outcomes that hinder or promote an organization’s goals. Previous research suggests that LMX plays an influential role in task performance (Gerstner & Day, 1997). For example, Martin and colleagues’ (2016) meta-analytic review revealed a positive relationship between LMX and task performance. Their findings suggest that high-quality LMX is a key contributor to subordinates not only meeting, but exceeding expectations in the workplace because subordinates are likely to receive additional support and information to perform their job duties. While job descriptions may be similar across organizations, the social exchanges between supervisors and their subordinates vary. High-quality LMX exchanges encompasses subordinates receiving rewards or benefits from their supervisor, which may increase subordinates’ sense of obligation to repay them. Hence, subordinates engaged in high-quality LMX exchanges may be inclined to display

increased levels of task performance as a way to show appreciation to their supervisor, whereas subordinates experiencing low-quality LMX exchanges are less motivated to meet job expectations due to receiving unfavorable treatment from their supervisor (Gouldner, 1960).

Furthermore, subordinates' perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace have also been linked to task performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Cropanzano et al., 2002; Mushonga et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009). In fact, studies show that when subordinates perceive their supervisors as fair, they are motivated to work because they are confident that their work will be rewarded and/or acknowledged (Mushonga et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009). Given social exchanges within the workplace determine the quality of LMX and its impact on task performance, understanding the mediating effects of supervisory justice will provide additional insight into the relationship between LMX and task performance.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisory justice mediates the relationship between LMX and task performance.

LMX and Job Satisfaction

LMX research has well-documented the importance of high-quality LMX relationships in fostering increased levels of job satisfaction among subordinates (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Lapiere & Hackett, 2007; Volmer et al., 2011). Job satisfaction refers to “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (Locke, 1969, p. 316). Such positive emotional states emanate from the quality of relationships experienced with one’s supervisor and often yields higher levels of productivity, making job satisfaction a key area of interest in the workplace (Fisk & Friesen, 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997). Consequently, subordinates who experience high-quality LMX relationships are more likely to report being more satisfied with their job. For example, Fisk and Friesen’s (2012) study revealed that LMX significantly impacted job satisfaction among employees, such that high-quality LMX exchanges were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. Additionally, previous research suggests that a reciprocal relationship exists between LMX and job satisfaction (Volmer et al., 2011). Therefore, subordinates engaged in high-quality LMX relationships are more likely to experience increased levels of job satisfaction, and in turn, subordinates experiencing higher levels of job satisfaction are more likely to experience more positive interactions with their supervisor.

Other research shows that perceptions of supervisory justice also influence job satisfaction. In Jakopec and Susanj’s (2014) study, subordinates perceiving their supervisor as distributing resources on an unfair basis (e.g., distributive justice) reported lower levels of job satisfaction compared to subordinates who perceived their supervisors as fair. Similarly,

SIJ has been shown to influence positive job attitudes, in which higher levels of job satisfaction were reported among subordinates who felt that they were treated respectfully and that decision-making processes were fair (Mushonga et al., 2014). Other research has confirmed a direct relationship between supervisory procedural justice and job satisfaction (Yang et al., 2009). However, few studies have examined the mediating effects of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and job satisfaction. Therefore, this study hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2: Supervisory justice mediates the relationship between LMX and job satisfaction.

LMX and Trust

Trust is a critical component in relationships, including those in the workplace, because it requires some level of vulnerability. According to Rousseau et al., (1998), trust is “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p. 395). Therefore, an individual may experience a degree of uncertainty in their relationships due to their inability to guarantee that another person will respond a certain way. Trust is a complex phenomenon that has generated significant interest across multiple disciplines (e.g., management, psychology, etc.), yielding various outcomes due to its versatility in meaning and application (Rousseau et al., 1998; Colquitt et al., 2007). While some studies have conceptualized trust as a ‘trait’ or ‘emergent state,’ others have deemed it as a ‘process’ (Burke et al., 2007; Colquitt et al., 2013). However, trust as a ‘process’ has become the primary focus in leadership literature given its association to different behavioral and attitudinal outcomes in the workplace (Dirks & de Jong, 2022; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). For example, studies show that trust is connected to a number of positive outcomes, such as task performance, job satisfaction, OCB, risk taking, and counterproductive behavior (Dirks & de Jong, 2022; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Colquitt et al., 2007). Previous research also suggests that trust is a multidimensional construct comprising two types of trust: cognitive trust and affective trust (McAllister, 1995). Cognitive trust encompasses making a rational decision to trust another individual based upon their level of competence, honesty, and dependability, whereas affective trust is characterized by emotional bonds rooted in mutual care, respect, and concern (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lewicki et al., 2006; McAllister, 1995). In other words, cognitive trust gives latitude in choosing “whom we will trust and under what circumstances” (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 970).

In the workplace, cognitive trust is typically established prior to affective trust during encounters with supervisors and influences subordinate perceptions of trustworthiness, making cognitive trust more salient than affective trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; McAllister, 1995).

However, trust has also been referenced as the “heart of LMX,” which is integral to the trust-building process between leaders and their subordinates (Martin et al., 2016) and a key characteristic of high-quality LMX relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980). Extant literature suggests that subordinates are more inclined to trust when they perceive they are treated fairly (Colquitt et al., 2013; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Although previous research has examined the relationship between supervisory justice and trust (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Mushonga et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009), less is known about the mediating effects of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and trust. Therefore, this study hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 3: Supervisory justice mediates the relationship between LMX and trust.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This cross-sectional, quantitative study was conducted at an agricultural nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Zimbabwe, Africa. A convenience sampling approach was used to examine the mediating effects of supervisory justice on the relationship between LMX and employee work outcomes (i.e., task performance, job satisfaction, and trust). Following approval from the institutional review board, the researcher contacted the executive director of the organization. The researcher informed the executive director about the study and requested a site visit to recruit participants. After a site visit was approved by the executive director, flyers were distributed and posted in high-traffic areas at the organization (e.g., breakroom, hallways). The flyers contained information about the study and provided employees with dates for on-site distribution over the course of four weeks. After receiving informed consent from participants, they completed the self-administered questionnaire. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants

The sample consisted of 144 participants employed at an agricultural NGO providing financial and technical assistance to small rural farmers in Zimbabwe. The participants were mostly female (59%) and ranged in age from 19-66 (average age of 36.3 years). Most participants (63%) held a baccalaureate degree and had been employed with the organization for an average of six years, with an average of four years under their immediate supervisor.

Measures

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, in addition to survey items that were assessed via a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Leader-member exchange (LMX). LMX was measured using an eight-item scale ($\alpha = 0.94$) that was originally created by Scandura and Graen's (1984) and adapted by Bauer and Green (1996).

Supervisory Justice (SJ). Supervisory procedural justice (SPJ) was measured using a four-item scale ($\alpha = 0.87$) that was originally created by Byrne (1999) and later adapted by Rupp and Cropanzano (2002). Supervisory interactional justice (SIJ) was measured using a seven-item scale ($\alpha = 0.91$) that was originally developed and validated by Byrne (1999).

Task performance. Task performance was measured using a 4-item scale ($\alpha = .90$) that was originally developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) and adapted by Yang et al. (2009).

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using a three-item scale that was originally developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) and was adapted by Illies, Wilson, and Wagner (2009). In addition, this study also used a three-item scale ($\alpha = 0.83$) of job satisfaction that was developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) and was adapted by Yang *et al.* (2009).

Cognitive and affective trust. Cognitive and affective trust were each independently measured using a five-item scale that was developed by McAllister (1995) and adapted by Yang and Mossholder (2006). The Cronbach's alpha of the cognitive and affective trust scales were eleven-item ($\alpha = 0.88$) and five-item ($\alpha = 0.87$) respectively.

Analytic Approach Adopted

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28.0 for descriptive statistics, correlations among study variables, and hypothesis testing. To test the mediating effects of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and work outcomes, the procedures prescribed by Baron and Kenny (1986) were utilized. According to these procedures, testing for mediation entails running a sequence of multiple regression models, in which the association between the independent variable and mediator variable is examined first, then proceeded with examining the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. Finally, the relationship among all three variables is examined. However, the first two equations must be significant in order to determine mediation. In the third equation, a meaningful association must exist between the mediator variable and dependent variable while showing a reduced and/or insignificant association between the independent variable and dependent variable. In addition, the study utilized the Sobel (1990) test to assess mediation.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables utilized in this study.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. LMX	4.367	1.230					
2. SJ	4.834	1.277	0.788**				
3. TAP	6.118	0.726	0.064	0.071			
4. JBS	4.947	1.192	0.422**	0.407**	0.231**		
5. TRU	4.552	1.375	0.858**	0.807**	0.060	0.510**	

Note. LMX = Leader-Member Exchange; SJ = Supervisory Justice;

TAP = Task Performance; JBS = Job Satisfaction; TRU = Trust; $n = 144$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the result of hypothesis 1. The results of the first and second equations in the mediation of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and task performance (H1) revealed a significant relationship between LMX and supervisory justice ($\beta = 0.818$, $p \leq 0.00$) and LMX and task performance ($\beta = 0.186$, $p \leq 0.02$), respectively. Additionally, results from the third equation showed a significant relationship between supervisory justice and task performance ($\beta = 0.181$, $p \leq 0.02$); however, the relationship between LMX and task performance was insignificant ($\beta = 0.038$, $p < 0.45$). Therefore, results of the third equation support mediation. In addition, the Sobel test was significant with a statistic of 2.326 and a p-value of 0.02, thus providing support for H1.

Table 2 Regression Analysis for Supervisory Justice as the mediator between LMX and Task Performance (Hypothesis 1)

Variables	β	R^2	Adj.	F
<i>Step 1</i>				
LMX → SJ	0.818**	0.620	0.335	232.05
<i>Step 2</i>				
LMX → TAP	0.186*	0.224	0.218	40.96
<i>Step 3</i>				
SJ → TAP	0.181*			
LMX → TAP	0.038			
		0.322	0.312	33.48

Note: LMX = Leader-Member Exchange; SJ = Supervisory Justice;

TAP = Task Performance, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 shows the result of hypothesis 2 testing. The results of the first and second equations in the mediation of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and job satisfaction (H2) revealed a significant relationship between LMX and supervisory justice ($\beta = 0.818$, $p \leq 0.00$) and LMX and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.409$, $p \leq 0.00$), respectively. Additionally, empirical results from the third equation showed a significant relationship between supervisory justice and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.259$, $p \leq 0.03$); however, the relationship between LMX on job satisfaction was insignificant ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.11$). Therefore, results of the third equation support mediation. In addition, the Sobel test was significant with a statistic of 2.154 and a p-value of 0.03, thus providing support for H2.

Table 3 Regression Analysis for Supervisory Justice as the mediator between LMX and Job Satisfaction (Hypothesis 2)

Variables	β	R^2	Adj.	F
<i>Step 1</i>				
LMX \rightarrow SJ	0.818**	0.620	0.335	232.05
<i>Step 2</i>				
LMX \rightarrow JBS	0.409**	0.191	0.185	33.52
<i>Step 3</i>				
SJ \rightarrow JBS	0.259*			
LMX \rightarrow JBS	0.184			
		0.310	0.301	31.519

Note. LMX = Leader-Member Exchange; SJ = Supervisory Justice; JBS = Job Satisfaction

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 shows the result of hypothesis 3. The results of the first and second equations in the mediation of supervisory justice in the relationship between LMX and trust (H3) revealed a significant relationship between LMX and supervisory justice ($\beta = 0.818$, $p \leq 0.00$) and LMX and trust ($\beta = 0.959$, $p \leq 0.00$) respectively. Additionally, results from the third equation showed a significant relationship between supervisory justice and trust ($\beta = 0.373$, $p \leq 0.00$); however, the relationship between LMX and trust was significant with a reduced effect ($\beta = 0.654$, $p < 0.00$), thus indicating mediation. Therefore, results of the third equation support mediation. In addition, the Sobel test was significant with a statistic of 15.148 and a p-value of 0, thus providing support for Hypothesis 3.

Table 4 Regression Analysis for Supervisory Justice as the mediator between LMX and Trust (Hypothesis 3)

Variables	β	R^2	Adj.	F
<i>Step 1</i>				
LMX → SJ	0.818**	0.620	0.335	232.05
<i>Step 2</i>				
LMX → TRU	0.959**	0.166	0.160	28.277
<i>Step 3</i>				
SJ → TRU	0.373**			
LMX → TRU	0.654**			
		0.214	0.203	19.217

Note. SJ = LMX = Leader-Member Exchange; SJ = Supervisory Justice; ; TRU = Trust

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

Although supervisory justice has been examined in previous research (Byrne, 1999; Ionescu & Iliescu, 2021; Mushonga et al., 2014; Pattnaik & Tripathy, 2019; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002; Yang et al., 2009), little is known about its mediating effects on the LMX and work outcome relationships (e.g., task performance, job satisfaction, and trust). The primary purpose of this study was to further examine how supervisory justice mediated the relationship between LMX and work outcomes in an effort to further advance our understanding of LMX relationships and resultant subordinate behaviors. The inclusion of supervisory justice as a mediator in this relationship advances our understanding of the direct processes through which a supervisor can elicit positive work outcomes in LMX relationships. The study's findings support previous research that have found both LMX and supervisory justice to be significant predictors of various work outcomes (Liu et al., 2019; Ionescu & Iliescu, 2021). Furthermore, all three hypotheses were supported which clearly highlights how increased perceptions of supervisory justice further explains positive employee work outcomes.

The findings suggest that when employees in both high- and low-quality exchanges experience supervisory justice as evidenced by their supervisor implementing fair policies and procedures, they are more likely to increase their task performance. This finding further suggests that employees in low-quality are likely to increase their task performance as a way to reciprocate their supervisor's fair treatment despite belonging to the out-group. In addition, the findings suggest that employees who have high-quality LMX relationships with their supervisors are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction. This finding is intuitive and supported in literature (Volmer et al., 2011), partly due to subordinates with higher levels of

supervisory justice being more likely to experience increased job satisfaction. Therefore, if the supervisor's fairness has a significant effect on the subordinate's work outcomes, it is possible that subordinates engaged in low-quality LMX relationships with their supervisors are likely to experience job satisfaction as well. Job satisfaction that emanates from low-quality LMX exchanges may likely occur when subordinates in these low-quality LMX exchanges perceive their supervisors as being fair in following policy and procedures. According to Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), in high-quality LMX exchanges, subordinates are treated as "trusted assistants" and conversely, in low-quality LMX exchanges, subordinates are treated as "hired hands". Due to the high level of investment involved in developing high-quality LMX relationships, Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) acknowledged that a supervisor can only develop and maintain a few of these relationships. Therefore, the low-quality LMX exchanges are relegated to only involving requisite fulfillment. This study's findings suggest that the supervisor's fairness is essential in maintaining these low-quality LMX relationships. For example, an employee in a low-quality LMX exchange relationship might still experience positive work outcomes (e.g., task performance, job satisfaction, and trust in their supervisor) due to their perceptions of the supervisor's fairness in adhering and implementing policies and procedures, etc. In fact, supervisors can use their ability to be fair to all subordinates in both high- and low-quality LMX relationships as a means to elicit higher levels of positive outcomes.

In addition, the dual role of the supervisor's fairness in increasing work outcomes in high-quality LMX exchanges and maintaining the compliance in low-quality LMX exchanges has the potential to transform low-quality LMX exchanges into high-quality LMX exchanges. This transformation is likely to occur over time especially in the case with trust in low-quality LMX relationships. Subordinates in these relationships are more likely to initially focus on compliance based on their job description and only trusting the supervisor based on cognitive trust (McAllister, 1995). During this stage, trust is based on the supervisor's competency, honesty, and dependability as observed and determined by the subordinate. In other words, subordinates tend to make calculated evaluations of the supervisor's fairness and trustworthiness. In addition, all exchanges are purely transactional, but overtime as the supervisor is observed as being consistent and fair, the relationship begins to transform. During the transformation, subordinates gradually develop emotional bonds with their supervisors, despite being engaged in a low-quality LMX relationship. Subordinates begin trusting their supervisors based on affective trust (McAllister, 1995) and engage in behaviors that go beyond compliance and their job description. In this stage, they begin to reciprocate as a way to extend an olive branch and initiate the transformation of the relationship into a high-quality LMX exchange.

LIMITATIONS

Despite this study's strengths, it has some innate limitations. First, data was collected via self-reported surveys, therefore; response bias may have occurred. Future research should utilize triangulation by collecting some data from other sources like supervisors and co-workers in an effort to minimize response bias. Second, the generalizability of the results is limited because data was collected from a NGO in Zimbabwe, which limits application to other national populations. Therefore, future research needs to conduct comparative studies examining samples from different countries to provide support of this study's findings and increase generalizability. Furthermore, future research should also examine whether one's culture affects LMX relationships and fairness perceptions in the workplace differently based on some of the cultural dimensions (i.e., individualistic/collectivist & cultural distance) as prescribed by Hofstede (1980).

Third, the data collected is cross-sectional; therefore, causal inferences cannot be made. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to examine causation. Lastly, there is a need for future research to conduct within-group analyses of subordinates engaged in both high-quality and low-quality LMX relationships to confirm or refute this study's findings.

IMPLICATIONS

This study's findings have some profound implications for practitioners regarding maintaining and ultimately, transforming low-quality LMX relationships into high-quality ones. Since supervisors may engage in limited high-quality LMX relationships with subordinates due to time and/or job constraints, they need a mechanism to maintain low-quality LMX relationships. The findings suggest that supervisors can accomplish this by adhering to fair policy and procedures in low-quality LMX relationships. Supervisory fairness, in essence, mitigates the negative attitudes and behaviors subordinates in low-quality LMX relationships might harbor because they perceive their supervisor to be fair, despite belonging in the "out-group" and experiencing a transactional exchange with the supervisor. This study's findings suggest that supervisory fairness may play an instrumental role in transforming low-quality LMX relationships into high-quality LMX relationships. This process tends to be protracted due to the fact that trust consists of two dimensions that are interconnected; cognitive and affective trust, and cognitive trust is a precursor to affective trust. Therefore, it is vital for practitioners to be aware that cognitive trust is quicker to develop in subordinates in low-quality LMX relationships by ensuring that they experience pleasant and fair interactions with their supervisor. On the contrary, affective trust takes a longer time to develop because it involves more personalized interactions between the subordinate and their supervisor. Therefore, organizations seeking to

elicit positive work outcomes in their subordinates should ensure that they maintain fairness at the organizational and supervisory levels. In addition, organizations need to be more deliberate in their efforts to provide supervisors with training that is focused on promoting fairness, cultural intelligence, and empathy, which are evidenced-based leadership strategies (Kock et al., 2019; Nowack and Zak, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study sought to contribute to the growing supervisory justice literature by examining the mediating effects of supervisory justice in the relationship between Leader-member exchange (LMX) and work outcomes. The empirical findings clearly illustrate the vital role supervisory justice plays in maintaining and transforming high- and low-quality LMX exchanges.

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