

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADER-FOLLOWER EXCHANGE AND JOB INSECURITY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST

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Abstract

The study examines the extent and nature of mediational roles of affective and cognitive trusts on the predictive relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and job insecurity. Six hundred and twenty-six employees are surveyed through questionnaire administration. Analysis of the data is done with simple regression and multiple regression analyses. The findings show no significant prediction of job insecurity by affective trust as well as no significant mediation of the LMX and job insecurity relationship by affective trust. The study also shows significant prediction of job insecurity by LMX, and significant mediation of the LMX-job insecurity relationship by cognitive trust. The results are discussed in the light of reviewed literature and current realities. The implications of the study are also highlighted.

Keywords: Leader-Member Exchange, Job Insecurity, Affective Trust, Cognitive Trust, Subordinates

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership involve trust building among followers (Bennis,1999), but neither leaders nor followers enjoy or give trust to one another all the time as the leader-member exchange (LMX) concept suggests. LMX is an exchange theory of leadership which has been seen as an event between two individuals where both parties bring something of value to the relationship (Yukl, 2010). LMX, also known as the leader-follower relationship, is the quality of the dyadic relationship existing between a subordinate and his/her immediate superior in the workplace (Harris and Kacmar, 2006; Harris et al., 2007). When things are good, subordinates enjoy lots of favours from their superiors; but when it is opposite, the subordinates are denied such favours (Harris and Kacmar, 2006). Whether employees are in good LMX with their superiors or are benefitting immensely from such a relationship may not be as big an edge as when things are not equal for the organization. Such times may include when the organization is not doing well and must downsize to reduce cost in order to remain in business (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). Whatever the case may be, this creates a huge sense of job insecurity for job holders.

The research supporting the LMX theory indicates that subordinates with in-group status with their leaders will have higher productivity and job satisfaction, improved motivation, and engage in more citizenship behaviors at work (Ilies et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2007). LMX is usually depicted as being made up of two major components. First, is the exchange component which is based on the principle that any social exchange between two people entails obligations, whereby either party believes or expects the other to be bound by the norm of reciprocity

(Gouldner, 1960). Applying this to LMX relationship quality, superiors give certain benefits to individuals with whom they have high quality LMX in return for which they expect subordinates to help them with work tasks that are beyond the scope of the formal job description (Liden and Graen, 1980). Thus, the rewards provided by the superior often create feelings of obligation on the part of the subordinate. To relieve these feelings of obligation, the subordinates work harder and longer providing the superior with extra-role behaviours by undertaking extra-role job responsibilities assigned by the superior in addition to their own statutory duties (Harris and Kacmar, 2006).

The second component of LMX is the relationship component (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000; Harris and Kacmar, 2006) in which the amount of benefits a subordinate can expect from a superior depends largely on the quality of his relationship with that superior. Employees in high-quality LMX with their superiors enjoy more privileges such as priority information and stronger performance ratings that these superiors can provide or facilitate (Schriesheim et al., 1999). The implication of this is that many of the role stressors such as uncertainty and ambiguity are virtually eliminated through the constant and direct flow of information and support from superiors for a high-quality LMX subordinates compare to a low-quality LMX counterparts. While organizational economic misfortunes may generally create a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in people, employees in low-quality LMX, compare to their high-quality LMX counterparts, may have their own uncertainties and ambiguities rooted in job insecurity.

Job insecurity reflects an anticipation of a fundamental and involuntary change concerning the

continuity and security within the employing organization in such a way that the nature and continued existence of one's job are perceived to be at risk (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). Typologies of job insecurity do exist. Borg and Elizur (1992) differentiated between cognitive job insecurity (likelihood of job loss) and affective job insecurity (fear of job loss), while Hellgren et al (1999) made a distinction between quantitative job insecurity (worries about losing the job itself) and qualitative job insecurity (worries about losing important job features). Ample literature suggests that perceptions of job insecurity may have detrimental consequences for employee attitudes (Sverke and Hellgren, 2001), and well-being (Mohr, 2000), as well as for organisational viability (Ketsde Vries and Balazs, 1997). In a survey of employees which had recently undergone major organizational changes, Probst and Brubaker (2001) find that the threat of lay-offs could put workers at risk for workplace injuries and accidents as employees who feared they might be laid off showed decreased safety motivation and compliance, thus resulting in higher levels of workplace injuries and accidents.

From this review job insecurity is in itself a major stressor, but not all employees experiencing job insecurity are distressed by it largely to LMX inherent advantages of good leader-follower relationships with their superiors (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000; Harris and Kacmar, 2006). The concept of LMX also suggests that superiors choose those they like or regard as good performers to fill the more important organizational roles while assigning lesser roles to those who are less liked or regarded as less capable (Harris et al., 2007). Thus, the prefer subordinates maintain close, high-quality LMX with the superiors (Dienesch and Liden, 1986). This category of employees enjoy their superiors' trust and emotional support which affords them several advantages including formal and informal rewards, and increased communications with superiors; while their counterparts, who are less trusted receive few, if any, benefits outside their formal employment contract (Harris et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). Irrespective of why they are not in good relationships with their leader, employees in poor leader-follower relationships would feel rejected, alienated and deprived. Although subordinates, who do not enjoy good LMX with their superiors, may not be emotionally inclined to trust the superiors, they may still find them trustworthy for their competence, skills, and integrity. Conversely, employees who enjoy good LMX with their superiors would be emotionally inclined to trust their superiors despite not finding them trustworthy on objective grounds.

Trust within the organization is the basic element in a working relationship between the leader and the follower, which can be increased or decreased by individual behavior (e.g. Laine, 2008; Häkkinen et al., 2010). Thus, trust building has been seen as one of the most important, albeit very challenging, parts of leadership (Yukl, 2010). Trust as a psychological state has been defined in cognitive and affective processes. The cognitive point of trust entails a state of perceived vulnerability or risk (Kramer, 2004). On trust in leadership, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) distinguish

between two different theoretical perspectives. One is a relationship-based perspective which conceives trust as a social exchange process whereby followers see the relationship with their leader as beyond the standard economic contract such that the parties operate on the basis of goodwill and the perception of mutual obligations (Blau, 1964). That is, individuals who feel that their leader has demonstrated care and consideration, will reciprocate this sentiment in the form of desired behaviors. The second perspective is a character-based perspective which focuses on the perception of the leader's character and how it influences a follower's sense of vulnerability in a leader-follower relationship (Mayer et al., 1995).

Another, dual, theoretical perspective of trust in leadership is the typology of McAllister (1995) which categorizes interpersonal trust into two different dimensions of affective and cognitive. Cognitive forms of trust reflect issues such as the reliability, integrity, honesty, and fairness of a trustee; while affective forms of trust reflect a special relationship with the trustee that may cause the trustee to demonstrate concern about the trustor's welfare. As a theoretical coincidence, cognitive and affective trusts logically and conceptually overlap with the character-based and the relationship-based perspectives, respectively.

Hopkins and Weathington (2006) study reveal strong positive relationships between organizational satisfaction and trust, and affective commitment while a strong negative relationships occur between trust and turnover intentions. When trust is controlled for, the researchers observe that the hitherto significant relationship between distributive justice and organizational satisfaction has disappeared. Hopkins and Weathington (2006) interpret these aspects as demonstrating the importance of trust for organizations in mediating the need for employees to feel that their organization values them and is concerned about their interests, and the importance of conducting downsizing in a fair and unbiased manner. Trusting may vary from complete distrusting to blind trusting (Ben-Ner and Halldorsson, 2010). If the trust has been damaged, it causes and engenders negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and fear (Williams, 2007).

In a study on the antecedents of managers to the contexts of trust, Sherwood and DePaolo (2005) observe strong evidence that antecedents explain differential levels of variation in trust depending upon the dimension. Their research further show competence is more strongly related to task-oriented than to relationship-oriented trust. That is, when an employee perceive the manager to be competent, the employee is more likely to trust the manager within a task context than in a relationship context. Sherwood and DePaolo (2005) study also found support for consistency being more strongly related to task-oriented trust than relationship oriented trust.

One major implication of these studies is that trust for leaders has high potentials for playing a pivotal role in LMX relationship and the subsequent organizational outcome. Arising questions are:

I. Will LMX negatively predict job insecurity given the prevalence of job insecurity among employees?

II. Can LMX predict job insecurity without trust mediating as a result importance of trust in LMX situations and the seemingly dependency of job insecurity?

III. Will emotional trust, compared to cognitive trust, not play a stronger mediating role in the prediction of job insecurity by LMX?

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

Six hundred and twenty-six employees from different private and public organizations are surveyed for the study. They comprise 417 (65%) junior staff and 219 (35%) senior staff, with 317 (50.6%) males and 309 (49.4%) females. The participants mean age and tenure are $\bar{x} = 32.75$, $SD = 7.32$ and $\bar{x} = 6.00$, $SD = 6.36$ respectively.

2.2. Instruments

The leader-member exchange scale developed by Scandura and Graen (1984) also known as LMX-7 is used to measure perceive leader-follower relationship. It is unidimensional scale which measures the perceive quality of relationship between a subordinate the immediate superior at work. The subordinate evaluates his relationship with his supervisor on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5) such that the higher the score on the scale the better the perceive leader-follower relationship. The scale originally yields Cronbach's Alphas of 0.86 and 0.84 for pre and post intervention treatments, respectively (Scandura and Graen, 1984).

The measure of organizational trust (Yang, 2005) is used to measure subordinate employees' affective and cognitive trusts in immediate superiors at work. The measure of organizational trust consists of 2-sub scale each of which has 6-item; the affective trust and the cognitive trust measures. The affective trust scale measures employees' trust in immediate organizational leader which is grounded in relationship with the organizational leader. While, cognitive trust sub-scale measures employees' trust in immediate organizational leader base on the leader's prior behavior regarding attributes such as consistency, predictability, reliability, and fairness. Responses are made and scored on a 5-point Likert format ranging from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5). The affective and cognitive trusts in organizational leaders yield Cronbach's Alphas of 0.94 and 0.95, respectively (Yang, 2005).

The job insecurity at work is a sub-scale of the job content questionnaire (Karasek et al., 2003; Karasek et al., 2007). The job security subscale is comprised of six (6) items which are in two parts. The first is worded positively and also score on a five-point response format ranging from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree (5); for this study 3

items are reversed to make them reflect job insecurity. The other three items are interrogatively worded with a five-point Likert system. Unlike the first three items, this items readily reflect job insecurity. According to Karasek et al (2003), the job insecurity subscale exhibited significant Cronbach Alphas 0.61 and 0.48 for men and 0.58 and 0.47 for women in 1998 and 2003, respectively. The authors also report that the subscale exhibit sound validity.

All scales and subscales are put together in the same questionnaire and are accompanied with a biographic data of age, job tenure, job cadre, and sex. The confirmatory factor analyses which are carried out on the scales reveal their factor structures reported by their original authors are the same as in the present sample. Similarly, the reliability analyses obtain in this study yield significant Cronbach's Alphas for all the scales.

2.3. Procedures

Collection of data is carried out using simple random sampling. The researchers hand out the questionnaires to the participants in their workplace and return to retrieve them after a week to allow time for the completion of the questionnaires without unduly interfering with their work schedule. Six hundred and twenty-six questionnaires of 1000 copies given out making the response rate to be 62.6% are found useable.

Data coding was done with adherence to the instructions of the original authors of the scales used. No coding was done for the two demographic variables used in the study (age and tenure) as they were both continuous variables. Except for the first three items of the Job Insecurity Subscale, which were reversed scored, all other items on the scale were scored directly.

2.4. Data Analyses:

Mediation analyses were conducted following the steps stipulated by Baron and Kenny (1986). This entailed carrying out a hierarchical regression analyses using the SPSS; and illustrating significant mediation with the aid of the Med-Graph (Jose, 2004).

3. RESULTS

Hierarchical regression analysis is carried out to test the proposed prediction of job insecurity by leader-follower relationship on one hand; and cognitive and affective trusts, as well as the demographic factors of age and job tenure, on the other hand.

As it is seen in table 1, age and job tenure which are simultaneously enter into model 1 indicate no significant contribution to job insecurity [$\beta = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$; $\beta = 0.05$, $p > 0.05$] respectively. The $R^2 = 0.004$, $p > 0.05$ and R^2 change = 0.004 $p > 0.05$ for the model are also not significant suggesting that neither age nor job tenure predict job insecurity either independently or jointly.

Table 1. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for the prediction of job insecurity

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	β	B	β	B	B
Job Tenure	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.13	0.02	0.03
Age	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.04
Leader Member Exchange			-0.04	-0.10*	-0.02	-0.03
Affective trust					0.00	0.00
Cognitive trust					-0.02	-0.13*
R^2	0.004		0.014		0.026	
Change in R^2	0.004		0.010		0.012	
F for Change in R^2	1.14		5.73*		3.48*	

Note: * = $p < 0.05$.

Model 2 of the regression analysis shows leader-member exchange significantly predicted job insecurity ($\beta = -0.10$, $p < 0.05$) with R^2 change = 0.010 ($F = 5.73$, $p < 0.05$). In addition the result shows that LMX contribute a significant 1.4% to the overall prediction of job insecurity. Model 3 features the entry of the two mediators - cognitive trust and affective trust, into the regression equation. Only the cognitive trust significantly predict job insecurity albeit negatively ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.05$), while affective trust show no significant prediction ($\beta = 0.00$, $p > 0.05$). With the significant joint contribution of 1.2% to the overall prediction of job insecurity [R^2 change = 0.012, $F = 3.48$, $p < 0.05$], cognitive and affective trust bring the total overall prediction of job insecurity to 2.60%.

Consistent with the instructions of Baron and Kenny (1986) for testing mediation hypothesis, 6 simple and 2 multiple regression analyses are carried out to cognitive and affective trusts in the relationship between LMX and job insecurity. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), for mediation to be significant, the four conditions must simultaneously hold; the Independent variable must significantly predict the mediator when the mediator is used as a dependent variable, the independent variable must significantly predict the dependent variable, the mediator must significantly predict the dependent variable, and both the independent variable and the mediator must jointly/significantly predict the dependent variable and the unique

contribution of the mediator must be significant in the joint prediction.

All these four conditions are satisfied when cognitive trust mediate the relationship between LMX and Job Security. Whereas, the propose mediation by affective trust on the relationship between LMX and Job insecurity (an aspect of hypothesis 2) is not supported. Table 2, shows that LMX significantly predict both affective trust ($\beta = 0.475$, $p < 0.01$) and job insecurity ($\beta = -0.098$, $p < 0.05$); just as affective trust significantly predict job insecurity ($\beta = -0.098$, $p < 0.05$), while LMX and affective trust significantly joint predict job insecurity ($R = 0.113$, $p < 0.05$). In this joint prediction, the unique contribution of neither LMX ($\beta = -0.066$, $p > 0.05$) nor affective trust ($\beta = -0.065$, $p > 0.05$) is significant. Since the unique contribution is not significant, affective trust did not mediate the relationship between LMX and job insecurity.

The other aspect of the proposition show cognitive trust significantly mediate the relationship between LMX and job insecurity. As table 2 shows, LMX significantly predict both cognitive trust ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.01$) and job insecurity ($\beta = -0.098$, $p < 0.05$); cognitive trust significantly predict job insecurity ($\beta = -0.129$, $p < 0.01$); and, LMX and cognitive trust jointly and significantly predict job insecurity ($R = 0.134$, $p < 0.01$), but in this joint prediction, the unique contributions of both LMX ($\beta = -0.043$, $p < 0.01$) and cognitive trust ($\beta = -0.107$, $p < 0.01$) are significant.

Table 2. Results of regression analyses testing for the mediating roles of affective and cognitive trusts in the LMX—job insecurity relationship

Variables	Coefficient of Prediction				
	B	B	R	R^2	
LMX predicts Affective trust	0.434	0.475**	0.475**	0.225	
LMX predicts Job insecurity	-0.044	-0.098*	0.098*	0.010	
Affective trust predicts Job insecurity	-0.048	-0.098*	0.098*	0.010	
LMX & Affective trust predicts Job insecurity	LMX	-0.029	-0.066	0.113*	0.013
	Affective trust	-0.032	-0.065		
LMX predicts Cognitive trust	0.579	0.498**	0.498**	0.248	
LMX predicts Job insecurity	-0.044	-0.098*	0.098*	0.010	
Cognitive trust predicts Job insecurity	-0.051	-0.129**	0.129**	0.017	
LMX & Cognitive trust predicts job insecurity	LMX	-0.019	-0.043	0.134**	0.018
	Cognitive trust	-0.042	-0.107**		

Note: ** = $p < 0.01$; * = $p < 0.05$.

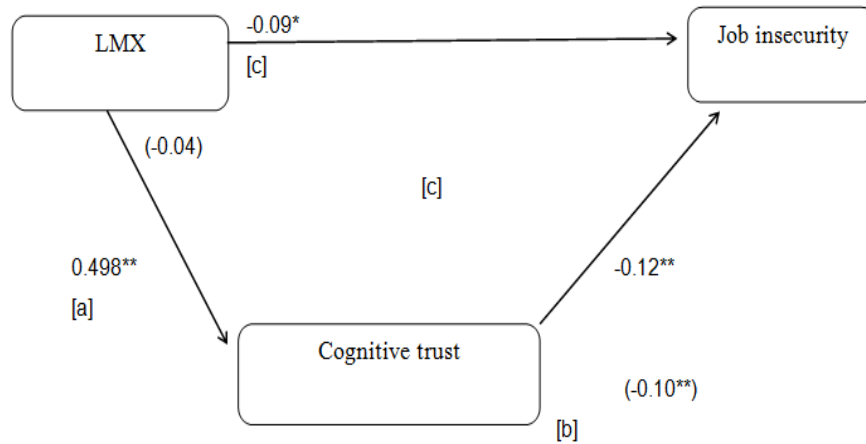
Given the significant mediation of cognitive trust in the relationship between LMX and job insecurity, a post hoc mediation analysis is carried out to determine the extent and other features of the mediation. To this end, the MedGraph (Jose, 2003, 2008) is used to depict the outcome of the

mediation analysis. As shown in figure 1, and table 3, the Sobel z-value ($z = -2.185$, $p < 0.05$) confirms that the mediation is indeed a significant one. The graph shows, cognitive trust plays a major mediating role in the relationship between LMX and job insecurity. Mediation is strongly suggested

because of the significant contribution of LMX to job insecurity ($\beta = -0.098$, $p < 0.05$). Further confirmation lies in the significant reduction of the strength of

prediction of job insecurity by LMX as a result cognitive trust inclusion which render the prediction not to be significant ($\beta = -0.043$, $p > 0.05$).

Figure 1. Medgraph for the mediating role of cognitive trust on the prediction of job insecurity by LMX



Note: The numerical values in parentheses are beta weights taken from the regression analysis and the others are zero order correlations which are essentially the same as beta weights from the regression.

Table 3. Shows the type of mediation, value and significant level

Type of mediation	Value	Significant
Sobel z-value	-2.185	0.05
Effective Size measures	Standardised Coefficients	
Total	-0.09	
Direct	-0.04	
Indirect	-0.05	
Indirect to Total ratio	0.543	

4. DISCUSSION

Given that job insecurity is characterized by intense emotions like happiness, fear, anger, and sadness, it can well be argued that employees whose jobs or careers are insecure will be fearful, angry, and possibly sad, while their counterparts with good job security will be happy and free of the fears associated with job loss. Although, affective trust is an emotional, the findings shows that the emotional nature of the trust become irrelevant as affective trust can not sway the prediction of job insecurity by LMX, despite the fact that high-quality LMX presupposes there is a strong emotional bond between a superior and a subordinate (Harris and Kacmar, 2006; Harris et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000) which may be akin to include affective trust. That the affective trust do not significantly predict job insecurity is also a confirmation of Lawal (2011) previous study relating affective trust to wellbeing. In addition, the negative prediction of LMX on job insecurity in the present study also supports previous studies relating LMX to wellbeing outcomes (Lawal, 2011; Harris and Kacmar, 2006).

On the cognitive trust significantly predicting job insecurity and also mediating the the relationship between LMX and job insecurity, of which the prediction of job insecurity is also negative, shows how much this type of trust is reckoned with by the employees' as a guarantee against job insecurity. In Borg and Elizur's (1992)

typology of job insecurity, cognitive job insecurity was differentiated from affective job insecurity. While cognitive job insecurity is a likelihood of job loss and affective job insecurity is the fear of job loss. The likelihood of job loss seems stronger than the fear of job loss, it also seems that employees will find cognitive (or pragmatic) trust more crucial to job insecurity than affective (emotional) trust that demonstrate concern about the employees' welfare (McAllister, 1995).

The rates of job losses, couple with economic meltdown have worsened increase in job insecurity across globe in the country. This state of affairs creates a palpable fear in the workplace, as well as put a lot of employees on edge. While these presuppose emotion, makes emotional trust more relevant, employees may tend to assume that it may be safer to have a good LMX with their leaders who are competent, trustworthy and have integrity. In actual fact, it appears that only when employees trust their leaders that they can be assured of job security. When affective is compared to cognitive trusts, it seems that cognitive trust requires stronger positive antecedent than the affective trust. Sherwood and DePaolo (2005) study attest to this assumption, as they find a strong evidence pointing to the antecedents of managers in terms of competence, integrity, and fairness as the determinants of trust. This therefore, justify the significant mediational role of cognitive trust on the prediction of job insecurity by LMX. In this

mediation, the magnitude of the direct contribution of LMX to job insecurity, is smaller than the magnitude of the indirect contribution. This indirect path indicates the amount of job insecurity which can not be predicted by LMX except the prediction is mediated by cognitive trust.

Most importantly, the ratio of the indirect contribution of LMX to its total contribution (the sum of its direct and indirect contribution) to job security speaks volume about the importance of the mediation role played by cognitive trust in the LMX-job security relationship. Since the direct contribution of LMX to job insecurity was insignificant, it becomes imperative to note that LMX would be unable to predict job security if cognitive trust does not mediate in the prediction.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study not only lend more credence to previous findings in literature, they also help advance frontiers of knowledge and understanding in the area of employment and job security as influenced by leader-follower relationships and subordinate-superior trust in the workplace. First, affective trust has no influence on some job outcomes, such as job insecurity which is also consistent with findings in previous studies. Second affective trust does not even play any role in the relationship between LMX and job insecurity, also consistent with available literature. Third, LMX and cognitive trust predicts job insecurity negatively but at various degrees. Lastly and most importantly, cognitive trust mediate the prediction of job insecurity by LMX.

The implication of these is that the sampled employees count more on objective evaluation (pragmatic) than emotional trust although they all desire good LMX with their superior which is not devoid of an emotional component. It appears the employees weigh the gains of realistic vulnerability to supervisor whose attributes qualify as trustworthy against the much riskier vulnerability to a cordial supervisor who may be irresponsible especially at the time of realistic threats to job security.

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