International Journal on Leadership
7 (2) 2019, 58-66
http://publishingindia.com/ijl/

Submitted: 05 June, 2019
Accepted: 31 July, 2019

Impact of Leadership on Employee Engagement and Intent to Stay

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Abstract

Research has shown that there is a current issue in leader member exchange (LMX) literature that needs to be addressed through empirical research. LMX theory has been shown to be related to outcomes such as employee performance, employee turnover, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job climate, innovation, organizational citizenship behaviour, empowerment, and procedural and distributive justice (Graen & Uhlbien, 1995). But, there has been very limited research relating LMX to employee engagement and intent to stay with an organization. This quantitative study contributes to the literature on LMX theory as it provides empirical evidence that LMX is positively related to employee engagement and employee intent to stay with an organization.

Keywords: Leader Member Exchange (LMX), Employee Engagement, Intent to Stay with an Organization

Introduction

Employees play a vital role in the success of any organization. They are considered to be the bedrock of any organization. Therefore, it is vital that organizations recruit talented employees who are engaged and intend to stay with the organization. Moreover, it is necessary that organizations pair these talented employees with leaders who will "boost and sustain their engagement and likelihood of retention" (Harter, 2015). Leaders are considered to be the fulcrum of the organization. They contribute a lot to balance between management and employee. According to Beck and Harter (2015), leaders are responsible for approximately 70% of their employees' engagement levels; therefore, to increase employee engagement levels "organizations must demand that every team in their workforce have a great leader" to ultimately assist with employee retention (Fitch & Agrawal, 2014).

In this dynamic business scenario, an organization must focus on the retention of their core employees. They must treat employees as an asset, not the liabilities. They must understand alternative ways to lead; and, they must also recognize that the leader-follower relationship, also known as the leader member exchange (LMX) relationship, is one useful means in the effort to engage and retain employees (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Leaders who maintain high-quality LMX relationships create a culture of engagement, keep employee trust, and help increase productivity, and employee satisfaction and retention (Cataldo, 2011). It is also validated by many pieces of research that organizations having supervisors with supportive behaviours, as in the case of LMX relationship, reported greater satisfaction and employee intent to stay at work or in the organization. This study provides reliable support that high-quality LMX relationships may positively relate to employee engagement and employee intent to stay with an organization.

Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

LMX is defined as the quality of the exchange relationship between an employee and his or her superior (Lussier & Achua, 2013). LMX is grounded in dyadic theory which is the two-way relationship between leader and follower (Truckenbrodt, 2000). LMX is a notable theory as it drew attention to not only the nature, but also the quality of the relationships between the leader and each follower

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(Northouse, 2013). It proposed that the follower was active, as opposed to passive, participant in the leader-follower relationship (Putnam & Mumby, 2013). It also suggested that the leader would ultimately establish a unique relationship with each follower that would eventually resemble a web-like structure of vertical dyads including "expanded and negotiated roles, which were called the in-group, and those that were based on the formal employment contract, which was called the out-group" (Northouse, 2013). The in-group received more support, influence, confidence, and concern from their leaders. They participated in the decision-making process and were given additional responsibilities and resources. Out-group members were not favoured by the leader; received limited reciprocal trust, support, and fewer rewards (Truckenbodt, 2000); were less likely to participate in decision-making, and typically came to work, did their job, and went home. According to Lussier and Achua (2013), the underlying assumption of LMX theory has always been that leaders have a limited amount of social, personal, and organizational resources (such as energy, time, attention, and discretion), and, as a result, tend to distribute them among followers selectively. Thus, the leader's varying degrees of interaction result in inequitable relationships between the leader and individual followers.

Graen and Uhl-bien (1991) described three stages in leadership-making:

(a) Stranger stage

(b) Acquaintance stage

(c) Mature stage

In the stranger stage, the boundary between leader and follower is based on implied organizational rules and the official employment contract. In the acquaintance phase, the leader and the subordinate assess whether the subordinate is interested in taking on more roles and responsibilities and to assess whether the leader is willing to provide new challenges for subordinates. Lastly, in the mature phase, the leader-follower relationship has been tested and there is a high degree of reciprocity between leaders and subordinates. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Mature leadership relationship is considered to be high LMX dyad in which the leader and his followers experience reciprocal influence, extra-contractual behaviour, mutual respect, trust and likings among themselves, and which alien the individual goal with the organizational goal.

Employee Engagement

According to Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002), employee engagement is defined as an individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as, enthusiasm for work. It can be considered as employees' willingness and contribution for achieving the organizational goal. It also describes how an employee puts his discretionary effort like extra time, brainpower, energy, etc., to work. Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004) defined employee engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. Positive work-related state of mind is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour is described as high levels of energy and mental flexibility while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication is described as a sense of worth, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge; absorption is described by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work.

Kahn (1990) elaborated Goffman's conceptual framework in terms that describe people's calibrations of self-in-role performances as personal engagement and personal disengagement. Kahn illustrated personal engagement as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles, which means personal engagement is when people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. On the other hand, Kahn defined personal disengagement as the extrication of selves from work roles. In personal disengagement, people withdraw and protect themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances. Kahn also described three psychological conditions linked to personal engagement and disengagement: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability. He defined meaningfulness as "the feeling that one is receiving a return on investment of one's self in an exchange of physical, cognitive or emotional energy"; safety as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career"; and psychological availability as the "sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment".

Kahn found that all three of these psychological conditions contributed to employee engagement.

Employee engagement has benefited the organization in various positive organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, employee performance, organizational commitment, profit, productivity, and employee retention. First, employee engagement is related to job satisfaction and employee performance. Employee engagement has proven to not only be related to job satisfaction, but also a significant predictor of job satisfaction (Farndale, Beijer, Veldhoven, Kelliher, & Hope-Hailey, 2014). Whittington and Galpin (2010) found that employee engagement leads to high levels of in-role and extra-role performance. Harter et al. (2002) explored employee engagement at the business unit level outcomes and discovered that employee engagement is positively related to productivity and profit. It was also reported that engaged employees are confident that their efforts contribute to higher productivity, influence higher retention levels, and impact profit. It is confirmed that engaged employees have higher organizational commitment levels (Chaurasia & Shukla, 2013), which influence others to increase the productivity of their work in order to improve the image of the organization.

LMX and Employee Engagement

H1: LMX is Positively Related to Employee Engagement

Chaurasia and Shukla (2014) found a potential positive relationship between high-quality LMX relationships and employee engagement. Barbosa de Oliveira and Aguiar de Silva (2015) reported that employees who had higher-quality LMX relationships with their supervisors were more inclined to be engaged at work; however, the research is still limited and lacks in confirmatory findings of the direct relationship between LMX and employee engagement.

Employee Turnover and Intent to Stay

March and Simon (1958) had posited that the employee's determination to leave or stay in the organization was dependent upon the balance between organizational enticements presented to the employee and the employee's contributions to the organization. According to them, when enticement increases, the employee's inclination to leave decreases. The equilibrium is established by the following two factors:

1. The perceived desirability of leaving the job implies that when job satisfaction is high, employees are generally less inclined to move, and when job satisfaction is low, employees are more inclined to pursue a transfer within the organization.
2. Perceived ease of movement from the organization implies that the more job offers an employee believes to have, the greater the perceived ease of movement (Tosi, 2008).

Porter and Steer (1973) had developed a modified version of Vroom Expectancy theory. They focused on determining the effect of met expectation on withdrawal behaviour. They defined met expectation as the gap between what an employee encounters on the job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he is expected to encounter. They found that when employees' expectations were not met, employees' inclination to withdraw increases and that their job satisfaction was regularly related to turnover. Mobley (1977) established an intermediate linkages model that was one of the first models to explore a logical sequence of steps between employee job satisfaction and actual turnover, also known as the withdrawal decision process. The process begins with (1) the employee's evaluation of the current job, (2) employee experience of job satisfaction-dissatisfaction, (3) thoughts of quitting, (4) evaluation of expected benefits of searching and cost of leaving, (5) intended search of alternatives, actual alternatives search, assessment of alternatives, (6) an evaluation of alternatives vs. existing job, (7) intention to leave or stay, and then finally (8) leaving or staying with the organization.

Price and Mueller (1981) conducted a study to determine a causal model of nurse turnover in organizations and found that variables such as intent to stay, opportunity, general training, and job satisfaction were related to turnover. Steers and Mowday's model, Lee and Mowday (1987) opined that an employee's decision to stay or leave an organization depended on: (1) job expectations, conceptualized as met expectations and values influenced, and individual's affective responses to a job; (2) affective responses which affect desire and intention to stay or leave, with the choice depending on a variety of non-

work influences like spouse's job and time left for family; and, (3) an intention to leave an organization leads to actual leaving. According to them, job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are considered to be the affective responses or stimuli which play a vital role in the employee's attitude and decision making process, whether to leave or stay in the organization. They had considered employees' attitude as the primary basis for this model.

Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and Intent to Stay

H2: LMX is Positively Related to Employee Intent to Stay with an Organization

Kim, Lee, and Carlson (2010) found that high-quality LMX relationships appeared to be associated with lowering employees' propensity to quit. Jordan and Troth (2011) found that the quality of LMX mediates the relationship between follower emotional intelligence and both turnover intention and job satisfaction. Liu, Cai, Li, Shi, and Fang (2013) reported that leadership style can have significant effect on employee turnover. They have taken LMX leadership style in their study. Finally, Abu Elanain (2014) found that LMX had a "functional impact on staff turnover intentions". Although intention to stay with an organization has been related to a number of variables, the literature is still meagre with regard to LMX's direct relationship to intent to stay with an organization.

Research Methodology

This study was a quantitative research study that was exploratory in nature. It endeavoured to capture the followers' perception of the dyadic relationship between the leader and the follower. The variables in this study include LMX (independent variable), employee engagement (dependent variable), and employee intent to stay with an organization (dependent variable).

Population

The population consisted of all IT professional, aged 18–40 years old, employed full-time in IT and ITES-enabled services of India. In this study, IT professional were targeted because the attrition rate in Indian IT industry is quiet high. According to a recent report by the Hay Group, the turnover rate from 2013 to 2018 will average 23%, with 192 million people leaving their current employers in this year.

Sample

In this study, non-probability sampling is used. In non-probability sampling, convenience sampling is being used. All the sample elements are taken from the two special economic zones of Pune district. All the sample units are from Hinjewadi and Talwade IT park. 325 Google forms were sent to the various participants in different companies. Out of which 134 complete responses revert back to the researcher. Almost 41% of the responses filled the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

Documentation was provided to confirm that permission was granted to use the surveys for data collection. Demographic variables were captured (i.e., gender, age, current job level, years in current position, and household income) to measure employees' perceived levels of LMX, employee engagement, and employee intent to stay with an organization.

Independent Variable: LMX

LMX was measured by Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) LMX-7 Questionnaire to assess the quality of the leader member exchange relationship (Northouse, 2013). The questionnaire consists of seven items (e.g., How well does your leader [follower] understand your job problems and needs?). The scale is self-administered and the responses are rated using a five-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (rarely) to 5 (very often).

Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is measured by Rich, Lepine, and Crawford's (2010) Job Engagement Scale (JES). The scale is based on engagement as conceptualized by Kahn (1990). It measures three dimensions of employee

engagement: physical, cognitive, and emotional. Each dimension of the questionnaire consists of six items. The items measure employee engagement levels (e.g., I exert my full effort to my job [physical]; I am excited about my job [emotional]; and, at work, I concentrate on my job [cognitive]). The scale is self-administered and the responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Dependent Variable: Employee Intent to Stay with an Organization

Employee intent to stay with an organization is measured using four items developed by Kim et al. The items measure employees' intent to stay (e.g., under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave the [organization]; Kim et al., 1996). Items on the scale are self-administered and the responses are rated using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Demographic Variables

Demographic variables used in this study include gender, age, current job level, years in current position, and household income. Demographic variables are captured in the study because they have been shown to influence employee intent to stay and employee engagement (Hajjaj, 2014).

Data Analysis

Data were collected by Google Form and exported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Second, data were cleaned, edited, and coded, and frequency distributions were run for each demographic variable. Third, each scale was scored by adding all the items in the scale, and Cronbach's alphas were computed for each scale to evaluate the reliability of LMX, employee engagement, and employee intent to stay with an organization. Histogram with the normal curve and scatter plots were studied to check the linearity between the dependent variable and each independent variable. Finally, in the testing hypothesis, correlation and regression analysis were performed to assess the strength and effect of the relationship between variables.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics describes the characteristics of the sample. Frequency distributions were run for each demographic variable. Table 1 indicates that 60.4% of the respondents were male and 39.6% of the respondents were female.

Table 1: Gender

		Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	Male	81	60.4	60.4	60.4
	Female	53	39.6	39.6	100.0
	Total	134	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 indicated that 58.7% of the samples were in the age group of 20s to 30s. Hence, most of the samples are in the entrant level.

Table 2: Age

		Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	20-25	38	28.4	28.4	28.4
	25-30	41	30.3	30.3	58.7
	30-35	28	20.9	20.9	79.6
	35-40	27	20.4	20.4	100.0
	Total	134	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Job Level

		Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	Entry Level	40	29.9	29.9	29.9
	Intermediate	35	26.1	26.1	56.0
	Middle Management	31	23.1	23.1	79.1
	Senior Management	28	20.9	20.9	100.0
	Total	134	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 indicates that most of the respondents are in the beginning of their career. 56% of the samples were in either entry level or intermediate level.

Table 4: Years in Current Position

		Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	Less than 1 year	30	22.4	22.4	22.4
	At least 1 year but less than 3 years	35	26.1	26.1	48.5
	At least 3 years but less than 5 years	21	15.7	15.7	64.2
	At least 5 years but less than 10 years	25	18.7	18.7	82.9
	10 years or more	23	17.2	17.2	100.0
	Total	134	100.0	100.0	

From Table 4, it was found that the majority of respondents reported that they had been in the current position for at least 3 years.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Reliability Test (Table 5)

Cronbach's alpha is an imperative measure of internal consistency; it shows just how closely related a set of items are as a group. So, in order to evaluate the reliability of LMX, employee engagement, and employee intent to stay with an organization reliability analysis were performed. All the variables have Cronbach's alpha value more than 0.7; hence, it can be predicted that the scales were reliable and that they could be used for statistical analysis.

Table 5: Reliability Analysis

Scale	*Cronbach's alpha*
Leader-Member exchange	0.915
Employee Engagement	0.817
Employee intent to stay	0.835

In order to perform correlation among the variables the data set should be normally distributed. Even though the variables do not have to be perfectly normal, there must not be any severe violation of normality. If the violation is too severe, then the p value calculated for the Pearson correlation is incorrect. Histograms with the normal curve and Q-Q plots were used to examine the distribution of each scale and confirmed that each scale was adequately normal to satisfy the assumption. Ensuring linearity between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables is an additional assumption addressed. Scatter plots were employed to examine the assumption and verified that the relationship between LMX and engagement was adequately linear. In addition, the relationship between LMX and employee intent to stay was also adequately linear to satisfy the assumption.

Hypothesis Tests

H1: LMX is positively related to employee engagement.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	*R*	*R Square*	*Adjusted R Square*	*Std. Error of the Estimate*
1	.717[a]	.515	.511	.12699

a. Predictors: (Constant), LMX

b. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement.

The first hypothesis stated that LMX is positively related to employee engagement. Correlation analysis was performed to assess the strength of relationship between LMX and employee engagement. Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between the two variables. The results of the one-tail correlation test suggested a statistically significant positive correlation (r = .717, p = .000). The positive sign indicates that there is direct relationship between LMX and employee engagement. The magnitude (r = 0.717) indicates that there is a strong relationship between these two variables. The value of Adjusted R Square in the above model summary (Table 6) is 0.511. Hence, the predictor (LMX) is explaining 51.1% of the dependent variable.

Table 7: ANOVA[a]

Model		*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
1	Regression	2.258	1	2.258	140.021	.000[b]
	Residual	2.129	132	.016		
	Total	4.387	133			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), LMX

Table 8: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.563	.237		6.581	.000
	LMX	.628	.053	.717	11.833	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

ANOVA table (Table 7) shows that the adjusted R-Square value is 0.511 and F-Value is 140.021 that is significant p = 0.000. These figures reveal that the predictor (LMX) has significantly explained 51.1% of the variance in Employee Engagement. The regression coefficient is 0.628 at t = 11.833 with p-value 0.000 (Table 8). Data set supports the alternate hypothesis in this case. Therefore, null hypothesis is not accepted and the alternate hypothesis that LMX is positively related to employee engagement is accepted.

H2**:** LMX is positively related to employee intent to stay with an organization.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.672[a]	.451	.447	.12437

a. Predictors: (Constant), LMX

b. Dependent Variable: Employee intent to stay

The second hypothesis stated that LMX is positively related to employee intent to stay with an organization. Correlation analysis was performed to assess the strength of relationship between LMX and employee intent to stay with an organization. Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between the two variables. The results of the one-tail correlation test suggested a statistically significant positive correlation (r = .672, p = .000) (Table 9). The positive sign indicates that there is direct relationship between LMX and employee intent to stay with an organization. The magnitude (r = 0.672) indicates that there is a strong relationship between these two variables. The value of Adjusted R Square in the above model summary is 0.447. Hence, the predictor (LMX) is explaining 44.7% of the dependent variable.

Table 10: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.677	1	1.677	108.433	.000[b]
	Residual	2.042	132	.015		
	Total	3.719	133			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee intent to stay

b. Predictors: (Constant), LMX

Table 11: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.896	.233		8.151	.000
	LMX	.541	.052	.672	10.413	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee intent to stay

ANOVA table (Table 10) shows that the adjusted R-Square value is 0.447 and F-Value is 108.433 that is significant p = 0.000. These figures reveal that the predictor (LMX) has significantly explained 44.7% of the variance in employee intent to stay. The regression coefficient is 0.541 at t = 10.413 with p-value 0.000 (Table 11). Data set supports the alternate hypothesis this cases. Therefore, null hypothesis is not accepted and the alternate hypothesis that LMX is positively related to employee intent to stay is accepted.

Conclusion

Leadership literature on LMX to employee engagement and employee intent to stay with an organization is limited. This study emphasizes that LMX with regard to employee engagement and employee intention to stay with an organization is a significant topic to consider for further research. This study contributes to the literature as it helps leaders determine if LMX is a driver in employee engagement and employee intention to stay with an organization. Additionally, this study provides evidence that LMX is related to employee engagement and employee intent to stay with an organization. Most importantly, it confirms that the leader-follower relationship is the cornerstone of leadership.

Limitations of the Study

Like most of the studies, this study has its own limitation. The first limitation was a small sample size. There is always the risk of not selecting a sample that is large enough. Likelihood of Type II error increases with small sample size. Secondly, the sampling design used in this research, non-probability sampling (convenience sampling) is used in this study. The chance of biasness increases when we are not giving each sample equal chance to get selected. Thirdly, this study only focuses on the IT personals.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a few recommendations for future research. First, this study captured the followers' perception of the dyadic relationship between the leader and the follower. Subsequent studies may want to capture both leader and follower perceptions to get a clearer picture of how the variables affect both parties. Second, this study used a small convenience sample. Successive studies should consider using a larger sample size in order to detect the significant differences among values more fully. Additionally, this researcher suggests replicating the study with different cultures. Different cultures may affect the nature of the relationship between the variables. Lastly, along with the LMX-7 questionnaire, future studies may consider using other existing measures for employee engagement and employee intent to stay with an organization.

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