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Leader-Member Exchange and Cooperative Communication Between Group Members: Replication of Lee (1997, 2001) Study on Malaysia Respondents

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Abstract

This study attempts to test the effects of superior-subordinate relationships on group cooperative communication. Based on the Tukey's HSD multiple comparisons test, it indicates that there are significant differences in subordinates' perceptions of cooperative communication between in-group and out-group; mid-group and out-group; and between mid-group and in-group. This study also reveals that the impact of superior-subordinate relationships was greater on cooperative communication behavior between group members in Malaysia compared to US respondents. Thus, in a relation-oriented society like Malaysia, the supervisor may be a more important factor in influencing employee behavior and attitudes at work group than organization as an impersonal entity. The consequences of these results were elaborated in details.

Leader-Member Exchange and Cooperative Communication Between Group Members: Replication of Lee (1997, 2001) Study on Malaysia Respondents

Very little research has attempted to empirically test the applicability of management theories such as LMX theory, developed in the US, to other nations. A good theory is described as having the ability to replicate. However, replication has not been adequately recognized as a valuable part of theory development (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). Tsang and Kwan (1999) offer six types of replications along with two dimensions. The first dimension concerns whether replication employs the same method of measuring constructs and analyzing data. The second dimension is about the source of data. In this dimension researchers may conduct a replication just on the data generated or employed by the study. A combination of the two dimensions produces six type of replication, which is: 1. Checking of analysis. In this type of replication, the researcher employs exactly the same procedures used in a past study to analyze the latter's data set. 2. Reanalysis of data. The researcher uses different procedures to reanalyze the data of a previous study. 3. Exact replication. This is the case where a previous study is repeated on the same population by using basically the same procedures. 4. Conceptual extension. This type of replication involves employing procedures different from those of the original study and drawing a sample from the same population. 5. Empirical generalization. Repeating a past study on a different population, a researcher conducting an empirical generalization tests how far the results of the study are generalizable to another population. 6. Generalization and extension. The researcher employs different research procedures and draws a sample from a different population of subjects. They further argue that replications do help to support or discredit theories, although they do not lead to conclusive verification of falsification.

This study attempt to retest the effect of Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) and cooperative communication based on Lee (1997) study on Malaysia respondents. We are aware that there are several attempts to test LMX in a country context outside the US, such as in China (Hui & Graen, 1997; Hui, Law, & Chen, 1999), and Japan (Wakabayashi & Graen, 1984). For example in Hui et al.'s (1999) study, the authors contrasted the effects of LMX with the effects of perceived job mobility on in-role performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) through matching data from supervisor and subordinates in a major battery manufacturing company in southern China. Their study replicates studies conducted by Settoon et al. (1996) and Wayne et al (1997). In both of these studies LMX was found to be related to OCB (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). In another study, based on structural equation analysis Hui et al. (1999) found that both LMX and perceived job mobility predicted OCB. This finding is also in line with Tsang and Kwan (1999) argument that replication of a study could support or disconfirm theories. The impact of LMX quality and communication behaviors in Malaysian organizations is under researched. This study will follow Lee (1997) construct and methodology in order to find the generalizability of his study. In particular this study seeks to verify the LMX and cooperative communication construct. Similarly this study tests the cross-cultural external validity of findings reported by Lee (1997) that LMX has a direct impact on cooperative communication.

Review of Literature

Superiors are limited in their time and resources and share their personal and positional resources differently with their subordinates for job performances (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994; Graen, Wakabayashi, Graen, & Graen, 1990; T. A. Scandura, Graen, & Novak, 1986). As a result, leaders tend to develop and maintain LMX relationships with their subordinates that vary in quality ranging from high (in-group), medium (mid-group) and low (out-group) (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Terri A. Scandura & Graen, 1984; T. A. Scandura et al., 1986). High-quality exchange relationships sometimes called in-group, cadre, or partnership are demonstrated by a high degree of mutual positive affect, loyalty, contribution or obligation to exchange, professional respect, and trust. In contrast, the opposite is observed in low-quality exchange relationships sometimes called out-group, hire hands or manager ship (Liden & Maslyn, 1998).

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory indicates that subordinates in high-quality LMX relationships received and report more favorable outcomes than their peers in low-quality LMX relationships. Duarte et al. (1994) found that poorly performing, high LMX employees were given favorable ratings, despite their actual performance. Moreover, Dienesch and Liden (1986) found that high LMX members consistently received more formal and informal rewards than low LMX members. Low-quality exchange members may experience a sense of unfairness which gives rise to feelings of second-class status (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Duarte, Goodson, & Klich, 1994). In a separate study, findings suggest that supervisors may afford differing behavior, and thus possibly use different communication tactics with subordinates in higher quality exchange relationships than with those in lower quality relationships (Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2003). Subordinates perceptions of superior communication behavior can be influenced by the outcomes individuals receive. Therefore, compared to subordinates involved in low-quality LMXs, subordinates in high LMXs are likely to report favorable communication behavior in their interactions with superiors.

Hypothesis Development

In Lee (1997) study cooperative communication in the work group refers to the message exchange behaviors designed to facilitate the joint achievement of work group goals. Tjosvold, Andrews and Jones (1983) suggest that as individual become more cooperative in attaining work-related goals with other group members, they exchange more information, more cooperative in resources, show concern and interest in what others want to accomplish, and provide assistance (Tjosvold, Andrews, & Jones, 1983). Further it is also argued that individuals' personalities also affect the cooperative behavior in working group (Lepine & Dyne, 2001; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). In addition, Lee (1997) argued that the one potential influence for cooperative communication between group members is the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) between superiors and subordinates. The cooperative behavior among organizational members plays an important role in contributing organizational effectiveness and social relationships. For example, LePine and Van Dyne (2001) study found that employee initiative through constructive change-oriented behavior contribute to contextual performance. In another study in health organization settings a cooperative communication skills intervention program among nursing home staff found to improve relationships with patient family members (Pilemer et al., 2003). These studies suggest

that the important of cooperative communication behavior in influencing various organizational outcomes.

Findings from several empirical studies suggest that LMX quality has a strong impact on social interaction. The differential qualities of LMX have been found to affect variety communication behaviors between superior and subordinate (Fairhurst, 1993; Krone, 1992; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Waldron, 1991; Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2002). Earlier research explicated how the quality of LMX affects subordinates' and superiors' communication areas such as discourse patterns, upward influence, communication expectations, cooperative communication, perceived organizational justice, and decision-making practices (Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Krone, 1992; Lee, 1997, 2001; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Yukl & Fu, 1999). In addition to this, a recent study indicates LMX and the magnitude of change interact to predict employee rationality (Olufowote, Miller, & Wilson, 2005). Thus, the quality of relationships that subordinate have with their superior will determine the types of interactions in the relationships.

Sias and Jablin (1995) found that differences in the quality of a superior's communication exchanges with his or her subordinates have an impact on co-worker communication. Co-workers are aware of the differential treatment and, in fact, talk about it. Furthermore, individuals in low versus high quality LMX relationships with their superior have more conversations about differential treatments with their peers. Sias (1996) also found that a co-worker conversation about differential treatment by their superiors serves to create and reinforce social perceptions about differential treatment in the work group (Sias, 1996; Sias & Jablin, 1995). Superior interaction patterns in high-quality LMX relationships typify "open" communication exchanges (leadership) in which subordinates are afforded greater amounts of trust, confidence, and attention, inside information, negotiating latitude, and influence without resources to authority. In contrast, low-quality LMX are "closed" communication systems (supervision) in which superior use formal authority to force member to comply with prescribed role (Jablin, 1987; Terri A. Scandura & Graen, 1984). As a result, subordinates in low-quality LMX are restricted in their opportunities to influence decisions, and, hence complain of their superior's resistance and unresponsiveness in their attempts to affect change. Based on these findings it is likely that LMX could affect cooperative communication among group members.

Although the majority of these studies on the impact of LMX and communication behaviors take place in the US, a number of studies have also been conducted outside the US. The findings from these studies have mixed results on the impact of LMX quality and communication. For example in a cross-country comparisons study based on communication satisfaction and organizational commitment, Downs et al. (1995) compared results obtained in US, Australian, and Guatemalan organizations. The measurement instruments used for this cross-cultural study were: The Down's Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire, and the Cook and Wall's Organizational Commitment Instrument. The findings of this study suggest that satisfaction with supervisory communication is a much greater predictor of organizational commitment than that of any other factor such as satisfaction with horizontal communication, communication climate and top management communication (Downs et al., 1995). These

findings suggest that supervisory behavior is a one of the major factors in effecting various organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment.

Findings from another study between communication practices and organizational commitment in Guatemalan organizations were significant only in an education industry context. (Varona, 1996). Also, a cross-country study investigating supervisory style and supervisors' upward influence with worker satisfaction in the US, Spain, and Mexico found that there was a relationship between perceived upward influence of the immediate supervisor and satisfaction of the employees. In this study, however, only Mexican supervisor influence had an impact on workers satisfaction regardless of the immediate supervisor's particular style of management (Page & Wiseman, 1993). Although these findings based on Spanish speaking countries, but it provides support for the assumptions that there are cultural differences in superior-subordinate relationships. These inconclusive findings raise the important issue of the use of research instruments in cross-cultural studies. As Varona (1996) argues, more cross culture studies are needed to develop a better understanding of the influence that cultural factors and organizational characteristics may have on the internal reliability and factor structure of research instruments created in a another culture.

Malaysia is a multicultural country in which the major ethnic groups are Malays, Chinese, and Indians. They cooperate harmoniously in their everyday living. Each of these ethnic groups maintains its own ethnic identity, practicing their own cultures, customs, behavior, the language they speak, norms, values and beliefs (Abdul Rashid & Ho, 2003). Malaysia is fully engaged in the international economy, it retains a distinctive mix of Asian cultural values. Malaysia cultures are mainly influenced by the Malay social structure that overlaid by Islamic principles and leavened with British colonial management philosophies and Chinese and Indian religious and cultural values (Kennedy, 2002). Generally, all these ethnics groups in Malaysia are motivated by their affiliation to groups, families, and individuals. Studies indicate that Malay, Chinese, and Indian Malaysians do not differ significantly. For example there is no significant differences between Malaysian Malay and Chinese in work related values (Lim, 2001); in term of cultural differences between ethnics in Malaysia only religiosity construct were reported to be different (Asma & Lim, 2001); and all Malaysian respond better to productivity increases if they see benefits ensuing not only to the organization but also to their family, community and nation (Asma, 1992).

In Malaysian organizational setting study it shows that there is significant relationships between participation in decision making and organizational commitment (Razali, 1996); two factors of quality work-life which is development and pay and benefit were significant in explaining organizational commitment (Razali, 2004); perceived information cues substantially contributed to job satisfaction; task content properties of identity, significance and autonomy as well as the interpersonal task attribute of dealing with others were significant contributors of organizational commitment (Pearson & Chong, 1997); and the 'mercenary' and network culture positively influence the attitudes toward change among manufacturing employees in Malaysia (Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003). It also argued that interpersonal relationship and collective behavior plays an important role in a Malaysian country context than in a US country, thus we predict that LMX are more likely to influence cooperative communication behavior among group members (Kennedy, 2002).

Lee's (1997, 2001) studies among 279 students with work experiences and 270 respondents from various organization found LMX quality has a significant impact on perceived use of cooperative communication among co-workers. We are also aware that a few studies based on multiple comparison analysis, found that the quality of LMX has a direct impact on communication behavior (Lee, 1997, 2001; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Yrle et al., 2002, 2003). Based on these findings, it is predicted that LMX quality may have a similar impact within the Malaysian country context. Thus, in this study based on Lee's (1997) study we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis: LMX quality in the Malaysian country context as perceived by subordinates will have a direct impact on subordinates' perceptions of a cooperative communication.

Method

Participants in this study are employees of a media organization in Kuala Lumpur. The organization is allowed to sell its services to various organizations in Malaysia. The majority of this organization's clients are from the local and international media. It involves in media activities such as providing in-depth reporting that is sold to other media and business organizations such as banking and information provider agencies. We choose this organization because English is used as a medium of interactions among its members.

Survey packets were sent directly to 312 to executives and journalists. The sample is made up of 205 journalists (65.7%) mainly located in Editorial and Audio Visual Department and 107 (34.3%) executives who are drawn from various departments. The rationale for choosing this sample is that all respondents reporting to a specific supervisor perform essentially identical roles. These roles include covering and reporting events for journalists and performing various marketing and administration job for executives. A total of 200 respondents (64.4% rate of return) returned the survey packet. 108 (54%) respondents were journalists and 92 (46%) were executives. Approximately 52.5% ($n = 105$) were male and 47.5% ($n = 95$) were female. Approximately 7% ($n = 14$) of respondents worked for the organization for less than one year, 13% ($n = 26$) have worked for one to three years, 23.5% ($n = 47$) have worked between four to six years, 28% ($n = 56$) have worked between seven to ten years and 28.5% ($n = 57$) have worked for more than ten years.

Measurement

The measurement of LMX quality in this study relies primarily on scales from LMX theory (Liden & Graen, 1980). LMX-7 scale items are used as a measure of LMX quality. This scale is widely used in the communication literature (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989). Each item in the scale is measured with a five-point Likert type scale. Pre-test results for this measurement show that Cronbach's alphas are .87. Subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Overall the higher the score, the higher the quality of LMX. The mean score of LMX in the present study was 3.38 (Median = 3.43, SD = .72). Following Lee (1997, 2001) we inspect of the frequency distribution to three equal proportions. The LMX quality as perceived by subordinates is grouped into three levels—in-group, middle-group, and out-group. 28.5% respondents are in out-group ($n =$

57), 34% are in middle-group ($n = 68$) and 37.5% in in-group ($n = 75$). Details of this comparison are shown in Table 1. In addition to this data were test for coding/data entry errors and tests for normality were conducted for each of the survey items as well as the constructs that are created by computing individual items. Tests for normality include kurtosis measures, skewness measures, and visual inspection of histograms. The majority of items appear to be within normality with kurtosis measures below one, skewness measures around zero, and normal-shaped histograms.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Of Out-Group, Mid-Group and In-group Based on LMX-7 items in Lee (1997, 2001) Studies

Group	N (Lee 1997,2001)	M (Lee 1997,2001)	SD (Lee 1997,2001)
Out-group	57 (97, 88)	2.86 (22.19, 3.88)	.37
Mid-group	68 (87, 80)	3.14 (25.38, 4.98)	.41
In-group	75 (95, 92)	3.50 (27.37, 5.56)	.62

The instrument used to quantify cooperative communication in this study was sourced from Lee (1997). The participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the statement that describe cooperative communication in their overall interactions with peers in the work group on a scale 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Pre-test results for this measurement show that Cronbach's alphas are .78. The mean score of LMX in the present study was 22.4 (Median = 22.00, SD = 4.36). The correlation matrix on LMX and cooperative communication is presented in Table 2 along with alpha coefficients. All the measures in this study and in the context of this paper both of LMX constructs and cooperative communication demonstrate good internal consistency ranging from .87 to .78.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Inter-correlations among study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2
1. Leader-member exchange (LMX)	23.6	5.04	(.87)	
2. Cooperative communication	22.4	4.36	.41*	(.78)

* $p < .05$

Results

This research hypothesis is concerned with the impact of LMX quality on perceptions of cooperative communication among group members. The participants' responses were analyzed by an ANOVA procedure. Analyses showed a significant effect of the quality of LMX on group cooperative communication behaviors, $F(3, 197) = 26.79$, $p < .005$ (see Table 3). Result based on raw score of LMX also shows a similar results, $F(3, 197) = 17.64$, $p < .005$ (see Table 3).

Lee's (2001, 1997) studies based on various US organizations (e.g., financial, education, chemical, communications, high-tech, retail and entertainment) found that members of in-group LMX relationships perceived their cooperative communication differently than their middle-group counterparts who in turn, reported significantly

Table 3: Analysis Of Variance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Group	13.65	3	6.83	26.79*
Within Groups	45.87	197	.255	

greater amounts of cooperative communication than their out-group peers. Tukey's HSD multiple comparisons test is applied to gauge the level of similarity between Lee's (1997, 2001) findings for the US context and the findings in this study in large a Malaysian organization. The Tukey's HSD method enables researchers to keeps the Type1 error rate at .05 for the entire sets of comparison (Pagano, 2001). Result of Tukey's HSD multiple comparison test at .05 (see Table 4) indicates similar findings to Lee's (2001, 1997) findings, that there are significant differences in subordinates' perceptions of cooperative communication between in-group and out-group $t(200) = .644$, $p < .05$, mid-group and out-group $t(200) = .266$, $p < .05$ and between mid-group and in-group $t(200) = .378$, $p < .05$.

Table 4: Mean Difference Between Group Members Using Tukey's HSD Multiple Comparison Compared to Lee's (1997, 2001) Studies

Present Study			
Group	Mean 1	Mean 2	Mean 3
Out-group (1)	-	.266*	.644*
Mid-group (2)	-	-	.378*
In-group (3)	-		-

* $p < .05$.

Discussion

As predicted, the quality of LMX affected cooperative communication among group members. The hypothesis is accepted as predicted and one-way ANOVA test indicates that the LMX quality has a direct, positive impact on subordinates' perceptions of cooperative communication among group members. Lee (2001) describes this finding as subordinates in low-quality LMX perceived fewer exchanges or less sharing of information, ideas, and resources with their work group colleagues. On the other hand, subordinates in high-quality LMX perceived themselves sharing information, ideas and resources with their colleagues. In addition, this finding enhances and reconfirms our understanding that perceptions about quality of relationship between subordinate and their superior do affect frequency of information exchange, sharing ideas and resources, showing concern and interest in what others want to accomplish, being supportive and open to each other's needs, and consulting and discussing issues to reach mutually satisfying agreements in the work group. Additionally, this finding also endorses pervious findings that suggest in-group and out-group members would form strong relationships among themselves (Sherony & Green, 2002)

The findings for this study have broadened our understanding of the impact of cross-country contexts for LMX. Similar to the US country context, our findings suggest that LMX quality in the Malaysian country context, as perceived by subordinates, will have a direct impact on subordinates' perceptions of cooperative communication among

group members. The higher the quality of LMX, the more subordinates report favorable cooperative communication behavior. These findings are consistent with the theoretical perspective and prior empirical findings of LMX to communication behaviors and activities in the superior-subordinate relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Yrle et al., 2002, 2003). As with the results from the US country context, subordinates in high quality relationships enjoy frequent information exchange, sharing ideas and resources, showing concern and interest in what others want to accomplish, being supportive and open to each other's needs, and consulting and discussing issues to reach mutually satisfying agreements. In addition, similar to findings in the US country context, the respondents in this Malaysian study also experience frequent information exchange, sharing ideas and resources, showing concern and interest in what others want to accomplish, being supportive and open to each other's needs, and consulting and discussing issues to reach mutually satisfying agreements. As a matter of fact, the quality of LMX appears to compare greatly to that in the US country context with respect to how individual subordinates feel about their cooperative communication experiences.

Additionally, this finding raises some interesting possibilities for theoretical extension of LMX. LMX researchers has not made clear what balance of high and low quality LMX relationship is optimal for a leader (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Although a supervisor might best use their limited time by fostering high-quality relationships with only a handful of work group members, there is also an argument to be made for each member of a team being afforded equal time and similar opportunities to form high quality relationships. In fact as indicated in this study, LMX influences the relationship quality among group members, thus it would seem advisable for managers to develop high-quality LMX relationships with all subordinates. In doing so, leaders would foster positive work group cooperation such as better information exchange, sharing ideas and resources, showing concern and interest in what others want to accomplish, being supportive and open to each other's needs, and consulting and discussing issues to reach mutually satisfying agreements which favorably affect other work attitudes such as organizational commitment or job satisfaction (Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005)

The finding in this study is also consistent with Kennedy (2002) argument that Malaysian people seem to put emphasis on interpersonal relationships and collectiveness. These interpersonal relationships are important determinants of interpersonal interactions for Malaysian people. Kennedy (2002) asserts that Malaysians are known to value interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the finding in this study affirms Kennedy (2002) notation that interpersonal relationships play an even more important role in a Malaysian country context than in a US country context. This is because this finding suggests that it is possible that in the Malaysian country context, there is a stronger relationship between LMX and cooperative communication behaviors than for the US country context (Kennedy, 2002).

This result also provides external validity for Lee's (2001, 1997) studies. In particular, the results of this study support the proposition that LMX exchange quality has a direct impact on cooperative communication in the Malaysian country context. In contrast to this finding, some authors argue against external validity across country. For example, Hui et al. (1999) argued that patterns of relationships identified in one country cannot be assumed to be invariant across country. The similar findings in both the US and

Malaysia suggest that LMX quality and cooperative communication can transcend country boundaries. Future, research would benefit from similar studies using samples from various cultures and nationalities. Further, we also echoing Tsang and Kwan (1999) that good theory should have an ability to replicate as a valuable part of theory development that has been demonstrated in this study.

Leader-member interaction is important to organizations. Unfortunately, such exchanges can also be a leading cause of employee distress. Recent research calls for leaders to develop higher quality relations with their members, which in turn can increase communication satisfaction. Scholars have also suggested additional research that focuses on interaction between leaders and members to better understand how leaders can and should manage such relationships. However, there is considerable evidence that leaders and members do not agree about the quality of their relationship. In this article, we address how leaders can build better relations with their members. Specifically, we explain how leaders might improve the quality of their relationship with members by focusing on an interpersonal communication strategy. First, we focus on a competing values framework to clearly establish the importance of relationship building in effective management. Second, we define communication strategies for building better leader-member relationships by borrowing concepts from rapport management in sociolinguistics. Finally, we demonstrate how our model of leadership communication (based on a synthesis of competing values and rapport management theory) explains the quality of leader-member exchanges.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Findings reported in this study have important practical and theoretical implications that extend LMX to an Asian context. LMX theory suggests that superiors are largely responsible for the development of their superior-subordinate exchange relationships (Danserau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Danserau & Markham, 1987; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Accordingly, superiors strongly influence types of communication experiences that subordinates will have by developing and sustaining different LMX relationships and thus, are primarily responsible for subordinates' affective responses to them. Therefore, to improve effective communication among their subordinates, a superior could offer opportunities to develop and maintain higher-quality LMX relationships with as many subordinates as possible (Mueller & Lee, 2002). For example a superior can increase feedback on jobs done by subordinates. A superior could also facilitate more upward communication and open communication with all subordinates regardless of their relationship quality or cultural background.

Cross-culturally, subordinates too can learn about and actively engage in communication behaviors that positively affect the quality of the LMX relationship with their superiors. They could provide greater competence and performance in tasks by asking for feedback on their performance from their superiors. They may also do things that may increase liking and trust and utilize impression management strategies (Mueller & Lee, 2002). Since the results of this study support the previous findings on LMX especially in the US country context, they also indicate that in the Malaysian country context, by improving the quality of LMX with superiors, subordinates are likely to experience more informal rewards—in this case quality communication behavior from their superior as an exchange for high perceived LMX quality from subordinates.

Although our study supports LMX and communication research in the US country context, there are at least two limitations in the current study. First, communication literature relies heavily on the uni-dimensional LMX-7 scale—that focuses on latitude—as an indicator of LMX quality. Future research could explore the multidimensionality issues of LMX—for example communication in organizations and LMX dynamics. As suggested by Uhl-Bien, Graen & Scandura (2000) and Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001), researchers must begin to empirically test issues related to social exchange in leader-member relationship and by nature communication. This suggestion relates especially to dyadic communication that is a means of social exchange in the daily operation of organizations (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000). Furthermore Dienesch and Liden (1986) describe leader-member relationship development as a series of steps that begins with initial interaction between the members of the dyad. Therefore exploring other LMX dimensions such as contribution, loyalty and affect can guide us to better understanding how LMX evolves in a Malaysian organization setting.

Secondly, this study was conducted in an organization that has direct involvement with the Malaysian government. Future research could also consider conducting a study in a multinational corporation (MNC) or private organization in Malaysia. Such study can explore whether comparisons between government and private organizations will help us to better understand cross-cultural effect of LMX.

In sum, the evidence of LMX theory and relationship communication patterns based on the Malaysian country context in this study improves our fundamental understanding of LMX effects in communication in differing country contexts. Results from this study further extend previous findings by empirically testing the cross-country external validity of existing LMX quality and communication behaviors scales. The result suggests that LMX quality and communication behaviors are similar in differing country contexts. Even though the US and Malaysia organization are different—the US has more emphasis on the individual while in Malaysia there is greater emphasis on collective culture—this result suggests that the quality of the relationship between superior and subordinate will have an impact on communication regardless of the country context and cultural background. The cross-country finding further emphasizes the importance of communication behavior to an effective work.

This finding also presents some interesting similarities with findings of US studies. In terms of the LMX association and communication behavior, this finding supports the results of earlier studies (Lee, 1997, 2001; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Yrle et al., 2002, 2003). These earlier studies indicated that the quality of a relationship between superior and subordinate has an impact on a subordinate's perceptions of their leader's communication behavior. In a relation-oriented society like Malaysia, the supervisor may be a more important factor in influencing employee behavior and attitudes at work than organization as an impersonal entity.

We hope that our study may contribute to universal understanding of LMX and superior-subordinate communication in two ways:

1. The LMX-7 scale employed in the current study may serve as a comprehensive and meaningful measure of leader-member exchange quality.

2. A supervisor as an agent of a system may be as important as an organization in influencing employees' perceptions.

In any organization, regardless of the context of institutionalism, a supervisor may still be psychologically and physically more proximal to employees than impersonal system. In turn, employees' attitude towards a supervisor will have stronger impact on interpersonal communication than employee attitude towards overall communication system in organization. In an increasingly globalize economic and social environment, systematic research in different country contexts is needed to test the generality or limits of existing theories and models that were largely developed in countries like the US with Anglo-Saxon Western culture and tradition.

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