BIDIRECTIONAL LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE AND THE IMPACT ON

MIDDLE MANAGER JOB SATISFACTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory focuses on the quality of the relationship between a leader and member. LMX is associated with a number of positive member outcomes, but LMX research has largely neglected what, if any, positive benefits leaders attain from high quality relationships beyond better team performance. The purpose of this study was to apply the LMX theory to middle managers in organizations. Middle managers inherently balance the competing interests of multidirectional relationships, acting as both a leader and a member in the organizational hierarchy. This study explored how middle manager's self-rating of LMX (relationship with their subordinates), leader-leader exchange (relationship with their direct supervisor), and the interaction of these variables predicted middle manager's job satisfaction. This study also examined the prevalence of incongruent ratings of LMX and LLX and its impact on job satisfaction. This quantitative study surveyed middle managers of a private business in the southeastern United States, utilizing the LMX-7, SLMX-7, and the MSQ-Short Form. A combination of multiple regression, correlational, and ANOVA analyses were conducted. The study found that LLX was a significant predictor of middle manager job satisfaction, while LMX and the interaction of LMX and LLX were not. The results of this study have both theoretical and practical implications, as the impact of LMX was able to be examined from the leader and member perspectives simultaneously and from the same source. This provided alternative insights into how roles, resources and hierarchy all play pivotal roles in the outcomes of LMX.

*Keywords*: leader-member exchange, LMX, job satisfaction, workplace attitudes, vertical dyad, conservation of resources, social exchange, LMX-7, MSQ-SF, role theory, organizational hierarchy, middle manager, management

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

**Introduction**

In the 1970s a new model of leadership was developed focusing heavily on the separate dyadic relationships that existed between leaders and their individual members (Dansereau et al., 1975). Unlike other leadership theories, the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory recognized the importance of mutual respect, trust, and the exchange process occurring between both entities as central to effective leadership (Bauer & Erdogan, 2016). Since its inception, LMX theory has been featured in numerous studies and articles, where the LMX is defined as the quality of the relationship between a leader and member (Martin et al., 2016). Despite extensive literature, the research has remained narrowly focused on leader and member behaviors and how they influence member outcomes. This effectively removes the unique leader perspective of LMX as a theory based on the reciprocal nature of a leader-member *exchange*. This study therefore investigated outcomes as they relate to the leader within the LMX framework. The study also looked to develop upon the current conceptualization of LMX through expanding the theory from an individual and group level construct to a multi-level approach. This new perspective will increase the practicality of the theory by applying it to real-world organizational structures that extend beyond a single leader-member dyad. Outside of the current theoretical vacuum, little thought has been given to understand how leaders must balance bi-directional relationships with both their subordinates and their own direct supervisor. While existing LMX research has been able to look at the collective members' relationship quality with the leader as well as the relationship quality between leaders (though in a more limited capacity), researchers have failed to investigate the

consequences of these converging relationships on outcomes of a single individual. The next phase of LMX research is to move from a group to a multi-level approach, exploring the interconnected web of relationships within the larger organization. In this context, the clearest starting point is with the individuals located in the *middle* of that web.

A key component of this study is the focus on the integration of Scripture and a Biblical worldview into the discussion of leadership and particularly LMX theory. The emphasis of maintaining a strictly secular view in the psychological sciences has become the norm in today's academic culture. However, this approach creates two primary issues in the development and execution of new research. The first issue is the removal of the researcher's framework from which an idea was conceived and developed. Christian psychologists, Roberts and Watson, claimed that all psychologists operate from their own normative view of the world, and that by taking the secular perspective, they do not become unbiased but less transparent and more dishonest (Johnson, 2010). The inclusion of a Biblical perspective in research acts as a means of transparency on behalf of the researcher, with the intent of a more holistic understanding of the rationale behind the conceptualization and operationalization of ideas being more accessible to the scientific and casual reader.

Second, the absence of Scripture from scientific inquiry effectively removes one of the most influential texts from consideration in research of human behavior. This is especially worrisome in Western cultures where the Christian faith has had a significant role in the development of modern society and individual norms. By incorporating Scripture into research, it allows for insight into consistent patterns of behavior and human thought across time. It also provides examples of individual interactions,

behaviors, and the manifestation of various personality archetypes, such as the ideal leader. The various parables and accounts laid out in the Scripture often provide meaningful content that can be applied in different and modern organizational contexts. This holds especially true in the realm of leadership, as ample evidence of leadership behaviors and theoretical notions are found throughout the Bible.

## Background

Originally founded in role theory (Dulebohn et al., 2012), LMX theory is currently viewed through the perspective of the social exchange theory (SET) (Chang et al., 2020) and the conservation of resources (COR) theory (McLarty et al., 2021). Together, these theories suggest that high quality LMX extends the relationship between a leader and member beyond an economic exchange and becomes more social in nature. Herein lies the complexity of LMX, as it not only examines the individual characteristics of those involved, but predominantly looks at the relationship itself.

A feature of relationship development and growth considers the exchange of resources, hence the foundation in COR. Addressing what constitutes a resource in LMX can be difficult to answer, as resources may vary and depend on several factors. There are, however, common resources that tend to be exchanged in high quality LMX. One of these is more autonomy or increased responsibility in the organization or over certain aspects of work (Chamberlain et al., 2017). Members with high quality LMX may also be exposed to new opportunities that low LMX members may not (Chen et al., 2018). Other examples include higher levels of trust between a leader and member (Chen & Lin, 2018; Nienaber et al., 2015), or having more involvement in decision making when compared to those with low-quality LMX (Obuobisa-Darko & Kwame, 2019). Ultimately, what

differentiates a high- and low-quality LMX is the degree to which these resources transfer between a leader and member.

**Outcomes of High Quality LMX and LMX Differentiation**

High quality LMX has been correlated with job performance (Martin et al., 2016), organizational commitment (López-Ibort et al., 2020), and job satisfaction (Nguyen, 2020; Volmer et al., 2011). Studies that do not specifically use the LMX approach have similarly found that a stronger relationship with a manager/leader is a contributing factor to higher levels of employee job satisfaction (Aloisio et al., 2019; Labrague et al., 2020). However, these findings come with a significant caveat: the majority of research has almost exclusively focused on member-level outcomes rather than also considering leader outcomes. In their comprehensive meta-analysis on LMX antecedents and outcomes, Dulebohn et al. (2012) noted how leaders act as the main driving force of LMX development, which is perhaps why leader outcomes have remained neglected.

In recent years, the concept of leader-member exchange differentiation (LMXD) (variability of LMX within a group) has begun to highlight the need to include leader attitudes as a component of the relationship impact (Henderson et al., 2009). Bernerth and Hirschfeld (2016) found that leaders with high LMXD among their followers also reported lower subjective well-being. When LMXD was low, the subjective well-being was not impacted, whether or not the average LMX was of high quality or low quality. Put simply, when all the LMX relationships within a group are similar, the leader reports higher well-being. The reason for this may be that higher LMXD is accompanied by increased perceptions of favoritism and subsequently more group in-fighting and turmoil. Regardless, these results indicate that the various relationships between a leader and their

multiple members combined, influence the attitudes of the leader. This means that while looking at outcomes of a single LMX dyad can be beneficial, it is likely necessary to look at all the relationships an individual maintains. Under the current LMX conceptualization, this is not possible for leaders, as LMX only looks at the relationship between two structural levels and not between multiple levels. Figure 1 portrays the more traditional approach to LMX, in which a single level of dyadic relationships is considered. While the theory has expanded to include multiple relationships with a single leader, the absence of outside entities removes a large source of attitudes, resources, and structure that all influence any given relationship. The inclusion of outside sources (a leader's direct supervisor) creates an additional dyad that quietly exists in virtually all relationships: higher powered individuals who dictate the organizational goals and access to resources of lower-level individuals.

**Figure 1**

*LMX Conceptualization as a Single Level versus a Multi-Level Theory*
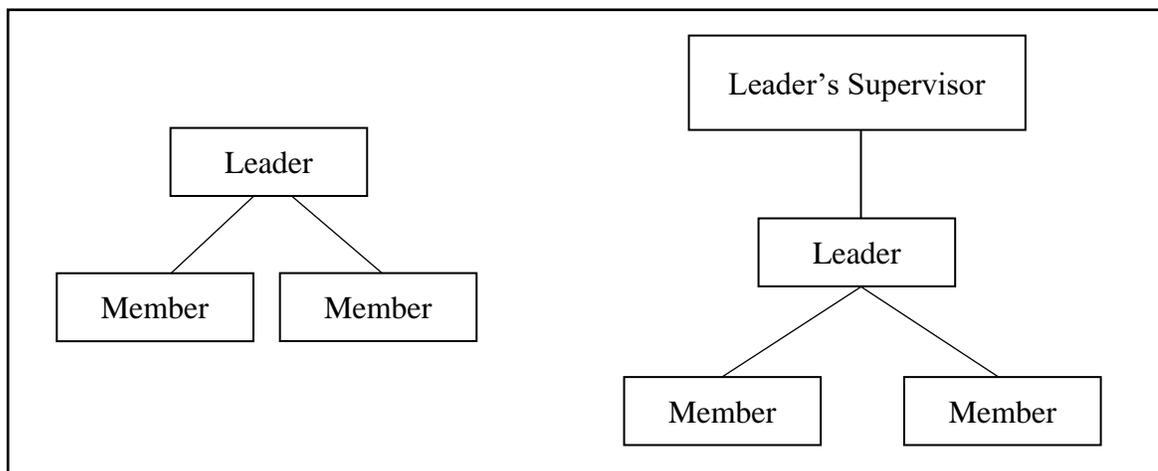


In its current form, it is unknown how LMX influences leaders in a more direct manner. While many researchers may have inferred that higher quality LMX (at the

group level) would be correlated with higher job satisfaction of the leader (i.e., higher general perception of relationships leads to higher feelings of satisfaction), viewing LMX as cut off from exterior relationships and influence limits both understanding and practicality of theoretical implementation. Instead, a new approach in which the quality of relationship a leader shares with their own leader must be considered.

**Leader-leader Exchange**

Leader-leader exchange (LLX) is the next hierarchical step in the relationship chain within an organizational structure. The LLX looks at the quality of the relationship between a leader and their own direct supervisor, and has been found to positively influence project, team, and subordinate performance and empowerment (Chen & Lin, 2018; Herdman et al., 2017; Lorinkova & Perry, 2017; Yang, 2020). Using the SET and COR theories, LLX suggests that a stronger LLX provides the lower-level leader with more resources to further allocate to their own members (Herdman et al., 2017). Herdman et al. (2017) also found that when LLX is low, LMXD is less of an inhibitor to effective teamwork, as members are more accepting of disparities in resource allocation when they perceive the leader as having minimal resource support themselves. In these cases, despite not receiving adequate resources to provide their team, leaders can still harbor trusting relationships and involve members in decision making, strengthening LMX.

Conversely, high quality LLX may not always translate to high quality LMX as some leaders may be inclined to hoard resources for their own advantage. Huang et al. (2020) found this was the case for narcissistic leaders, who tend to use most of their resources in benefiting themselves. Here, it can be assumed there would be a higher-quality LLX and a lower quality LMX, as the resources are not effectively moving

between the different levels.

While assumptions can be made, the actual attitudes of the leader are overlooked, as LLX maintains the LMX perspective of the outcomes as they ultimately relate to the lowest level member. Strong LLX usually leads to better member outcomes, but what impact does it have on the leader? Further, it also raises questions to the extent that a strong quality LMX is dependent upon high quality LLX. While the above description of leaders who both reallocate or hoard resources is possible, it is unknown how prevalent the existence of antagonistic groupings of high LLX and low LMX, or vice versa, truly is.

**Competing Relationships for Mid-Level Leaders**

Dulebohn et al. (2012) suggested that a leader will hold more authority in the LMX development process than the member (this is most likely due to the natural power disparity that exists in the traditional leader-member structure). Leaders must then decide who will be the recipient of the resources in the exchange since all relationships vary in quality. Several factors play a role in the decision-making process involved in LMX, such as perceived ability, competency, and similarity with the leader (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). On the other hand, members will typically want to have more access to the resources a leader can provide, leading to them vying for positions in the in-group (Salehzadeh, 2020).

The same is true at the higher level, as leaders must also dedicate time and compete with others for resources with their own supervisors (LLX). While all internal to the work domain, resource drain forces leaders to prioritize the energy and time spent toward building a specific relationship over another. If some leaders then focus on personal career growth, the majority of effort will be spent building LLX, which may

come at the cost of LMX (or exasperate LMXD). Additionally, leaders may focus on building relationships with those they perceive as most relatable. Studies have indicated that middle managers are much more likely to identify as leaders than members, which may further suggest there is a greater likelihood that they will confide in and build rapport with other leaders first (Falls & Allen, 2020).

Additionally, every individual derives job satisfaction from different aspects of their work or organization. This is to say that managers may rely more on the outcomes of their relationship with their own supervisor, not necessarily for ascension in the hierarchy, but because their direct supervisor is the face of the organization itself. Research has shown that a manager's satisfaction is more heavily influenced by perceived organizational support, communication, and corporate social responsibility, than are general employees (Chen et al., 2020; Doleman et al., 2020; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Lu et al., 2016). These aspects of the job come almost exclusively from the top levels of the organization which is often represented by the individual's direct supervisor. Therefore, middle managers may be inclined to focus on upward relationships as a proxy of the greater organization's influence on manager satisfaction. For example, if a manager feels their job satisfaction is tied greatly to their organization's corporate social responsibility, they may focus on developing LLX with their direct supervisor, as they may believe building that relationship will have a larger impact on future organization social activity. Since the general direction of the organization comes from upper-level directives, influence from relationship building must be directed upwards.

**Multi-level Approach to LMX Structure**

This all lends to the notion that in order to more fully recognize how LMX

impacts a leader's job satisfaction, a more holistic, multi-level approach must be implemented. Taking into consideration both upward and downward relationship quality will provide a clearer overall picture of how a middle manager's job satisfaction is influenced by competing relationships in the workplace. DeChurch et al. (2010) found that middle managers are one of the most underrepresented groups in organizational research. Given their pivotal role as a central node in communication (Okafor et al., 2020), policy implementation (van Dam et al., 2021), and frontline daily management (Ozawa, 2020), recognizing how LMX influences their job satisfaction could be essential in improving performance, engagement, and retention (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017; Kim & Yi, 2018).

**Biblical Significance of Organizational and Leadership Research**

The Bible portrays ideal leadership characteristics as well as the structure of work and organizations more generally. The development of organizational hierarchies is not a foreign concept to the Scripture, and there exists multiple examples of individuals moving into positions of authority and leadership. This movement of individuals and the struggle for power over groups and nations sheds light into the nature of individuals to aspire to ascend in the social/organizational hierarchy. The Bible also describes the factors that inspire individuals to take leadership roles, how they lead, and how they adapt to these roles. Some of the lessons in Scripture have even led to some researchers acknowledging the similarities between Scripture and existing leadership theories (e.g., Mark 10:42-44 and the link to servant leadership; Shirin, 2015). While not as explicitly connected, there is a strong argument to be made that LMX theory is the most prominent theory of leadership expressed in the Bible.

**Biblical Significance of LMX Theory**

The foundation of humanity's relationship with God is built upon an exchange in which the Scripture states that "all who receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, John 1:12). This display of faith by the people is consistently demonstrated to be exchanged with God for forgiveness, safety, comfort, and eternal life. As it relates to the followers of God, their own leadership is built upon the idea of exchange, typically in the form of trust, direction, or prosperity (e.g., Moses and the Israelites, King Solomon and the prosperity of the people).

Another foundational aspect of LMX theory is that each dyadic relationship is unique. This is a concept that can be seen when observing Jesus' relationships with His disciples. While it is known that Jesus had 12 disciples, there are multiple examples throughout the Bible where Jesus seemed to favor three in particular: Peter, James, and John. These three were the only disciples brought to the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-3), or who accompanied Him to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-38). Clearly, these three had relationships that slightly differed from the other nine disciples. What we can also recognize is that Jesus had his own relationship with God, an example of bidirectional relationships like those being examined in this study. The struggle we see in Jesus trying to maintain His position as the leader of these disciples while following the will of His own leader (to put things extremely simplistically), demonstrates the challenges of being in the unique middle position.

Issues also arise in how well-being and general satisfaction is derived from the relationships both in Biblical stories and in everyday life. In some form, a multi-level

exchange exists from the individual to God and the individual to those around them (the community, family, friends, etc.). While the importance of one's quality of relationship with God cannot be overstated, it is not the only relationship that individuals cultivate, and subsequently is not the only dyad that impacts satisfaction. Better understanding of how we view our relationships in various domains, and viewing this from the Biblical perspective, provides new insights into the challenges of balancing effort and energy in ways that not only benefit the individual, but those who may structurally be above and below as well. A more detailed overview of Scriptural insight to the topic of leadership and LMX will be conducted in Chapter 2.

## Problem Statement

The LMX has been extensively studied as it relates to various individual outcomes, such as satisfaction, engagement, performance, and commitment (Breevaart et al., 2015; Bugvi & Wafa, 2018; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Flickinger et al., 2016; Gutermann et al., 2017; López-Ibort et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2016). In recent years, increased attention on LMXD has become more prominent in research, highlighting the uniqueness of LMX as a leadership theory, where each leader-member relationship forms and develops differently from others (Chen et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2016). This intensified focus has found that differentiation in LMX can impact member outcomes (Buengeler et al., 2021; Sherony & Green, 2002).

Despite all the attention, there has been a continuous theme of researchers neglecting to measure leader outcomes of LMX, effectively overlooking half of the traditionally viewed exchange. With recent findings suggesting LMXD impacts leader well-being (Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016), it is becoming clear that LMX must be

revisited to better understand how leaders perceive the return on the exchange. It is also worth noting that leaders and members have differing baselines (and antecedents) of satisfaction and commitment, often being more critical of organizational support and communications, and without the consideration of leadership influence (i.e., LMX) (Doleman et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2016; Pick & Teo, 2016). This all means that LMX (from either direction) will most likely affect middle managers differently than the traditional frontline worker that is often the focus of research. The prevailing issue is *how* LMX then impacts this group of individuals. As previously discussed, not only are leaders neglected in LMX study, but middle managers as a whole are neglected in organizational research. By focusing on this group, it not only allows for a better understanding of how LMX impacts leader outcomes, but also continues to build literature relating to an underrepresented position that exists in most organizations.

Where LMX research has also come up short is in providing a leadership theory that can practically apply to a real-world organization. While LMX focuses on the individual dyad, the participants of this relationship still exist within the larger organizational structure. In this context, the dyad does not exist within a vacuum. A middle manager does not act solely as a leader within multiple unique dyads but also acts as a member in an exchange with their own direct supervision. While studies have looked at the influence of LLX on group outcomes (Chen & Lin, 2018; Herdman et al., 2017; Lorinkova & Perry, 2017), no studies have looked at the dual obligations of LMX and LLX for the leader that partakes in both exchanges. In order to develop a LMX model that is more applicable to actual organizational structures and hierarchies, researchers must acknowledge that middle managers are required to develop and maintain

bidirectional exchanges that will inevitably influence one another. This research will not only bring attention to leader outcomes of LMX but will show how middle managers balance relationships in both the upward and downward direction, and how any potential disparity in relationship quality influences overall job satisfaction.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative survey study was to examine how middle managers' job satisfaction can be predicted by the LMX quality with their direct supervisor and their subordinates. This study will further explore LMXD from a multi-level perspective (the difference between the LMX and LLX scores), and how these internalized competing roles (leader and member) are related to the individual's job satisfaction.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

### Research Questions

RQ1: Does the quality of the leader-member relationship as measured by LMX score significantly predict job satisfaction in middle managers?

RQ 2: Does the quality of the leader-direct supervisor relationship as measured by LLX score significantly predict job satisfaction in middle managers above and beyond LMX score?

RQ 3: Does the relationship between LLX and job satisfaction depend on respondents' levels of LMX, and vice versa?

RQ 4: What is the prevalence of middle managers who report antagonistic LMX-LLX relationships (i.e., high LMX and low LLX, or low LMX and high LLX)?

RQ 5: Does the differentiation between LMX and LLX, as measured by the difference in composite LMX-LLX scores, predict job satisfaction in middle managers?

**Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: Middle managers' LMX scores in relation to the leader-member relationship will be a statistically and practically significant predictor of middle manager job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Middle managers' LLX scores in relation to the leader-direct supervisor relationship will statistically and practically significantly predict middle manager job satisfaction above and beyond LMX scores.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between LLX and job satisfaction does not depend on LMX.

Hypothesis 4: A minority of middle managers will report high LMX quality in one direction and low LMX quality in the other.

Hypothesis 5: Smaller LMX multi-level differentiation (i.e., the difference between the LMX and LLX scores) will predict middle manager job satisfaction.

**Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

The nature of the study creates a few assumptions, the biggest of which relates to the need to rely on a single individual within an LMX group to provide relationship assessments. There has been an increase in the use of aggregate LMX scoring, as seen in Kawaguchi et al.'s (2021) work on LMX in nurses. However, in these cases, the

aggregate scoring is the mean value of the members of a single team (all under the same leader). This approach requires a much higher participation rate, as it depends on survey responses from leaders and multiple members to create a single data point. The use of aggregate member scoring also does not take into consideration the leader's perception of the relationships.

This study will ask the leader to think about the individual the leader has managed the longest when assessing the leader-member relationship. This leads to two primary assumptions. The first is that the leader will have had the longest time to form and develop the LMX with this specific member, which may ignore previous less formal leader-member roles (e.g., project-lead prior to promotion to management, co-worker bond formed previously, experience with that member in a previous role). Second, this strategy creates the assumption that the individual will provide an honest assessment of that relationship. If a middle manager is unable to accurately reflect on the relationship quality, the results will still provide meaningful information as the job satisfaction can still be related to the individual's own perception. If the individual purposefully misrepresents the strength of their relationship with either their member or direct supervisor, it does have the potential to alter results. Research has found that leaders can be reluctant to embrace a follower role (Falls & Allen, 2020). This may suggest that being seen as a leader is more important to the individual, and they may be more likely to enhance the LMX score with their subordinates as a defense of their own position as effective leaders. This study looks to mitigate these risks by ensuring anonymity in the responses and assumes that participants would not willfully deceive the researcher in their survey responses.

One of the assumptions made was that managers included in the study have had sufficient time to develop a baseline recognition of LMX across levels. Ye, He, and Lu (2021) found that LMX develops over time, and in the initial phases of relationship development, factors such as employee attitude and relatedness can influence the relationship. Middle managers who have not been in the position long enough may not be able to accurately measure LMX as the quality of the relationships but instead rely on short-term opinion and judgements of liking other members as a substitute. It is important then to acknowledge that LMX will fluctuate and change over time, and the LMX or LLX relationship can look dramatically different at a different point in time. The LMX development is instead contained within the scope of an individual's proclivity for relationship development (in the same manner as individuals vary in other traits) and the study looks to create a snapshot of LMX across dimensions which may not be replicable in more or less experienced subject pools.

A limitation in this study arises from the nature of a data analysis based without longitudinal data. Whether or not this study finds that LMX or LLX can predict job satisfaction, the study will not be able to demonstrate causality. For example, if it was found that individuals who have strong relationships upward are more likely to have stronger relationships downward (compared to those with low or medium strength upward LMX), this does not necessarily inform of the direction of the relationship (e.g., strong LMX with a supervisor leads to strong LMX with members), nor does it imply that one is directly causing the other. Instead, all that can be determined is that this relationship exists. Further longitudinal investigations may be able to shed light on how the one relationship may influence another more directly. This limitation also leads to a

lack of further understanding of the LMX process. While this study may expose some of the bigger strengths and weaknesses in LMX in the two directions (e.g., communication is easier to control with members than a supervisor, supervisors provide more resources), it does not explain *how* LMX develops (type of communication, what resources are leveraged, etc.).

A final limitation will be dependent on the participant pool of the study. While multiple job sectors actively use middle managers, the generalizability of this study will vary based on job sector, job type, and potential organization size of the subjects. For instance, if a majority of participants are white collar employees working in larger corporations, the results may not be transferrable to the analysis of middle manager's job satisfaction and competing LMX interests in blue collar industries (e.g., factory line manager). Seeking a diverse population pool to recruit from could help mitigate this limitation, but may not be possible pending organizational agreement and availability

**Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

As previously discussed, LMX has been addressed from the perspective of numerous theories, each bringing their own advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, this study views LMX as based in role theory. Particularly, as middle managers become embedded in the larger web of relationships, they develop an understanding of their conflicting roles as both a leader and a follower. This dichotomy is what ultimately creates a struggle of balance between both internal and external competing interests. How, and to what extent, middle managers are able to embrace their roles will dictate the emphasis they place on their upwards and downwards relationships. The SET and COR play a part in the application of one's role, as their role is imposed through social

exchanges and the apportionment of available resources. Still, the foundation of forming a role is the basis of how one postures within the exchange.

Throughout Scripture, as leaders begin to rise into prominence, the struggle of role creation and development often frame the narrative in which the LMX (both upward and downward) quality exists. When God first tells Moses that he will go to Pharaoh to free the Israelites, Moses asks "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 3:11). He asks what he should say if the Israelites challenge his authority. Continually, Moses returns to the Lord and questions why he was chosen. This story not only exemplifies the development of a "social" relationship between the Lord and Moses, but also demonstrates how those in mid-levels of leadership take on their roles. In an everyday sense, Moses' relationship with God puts him in a position of power as a leader of the Israelites. Still, Moses must identify his role and take the direction provided by his leader and ensure that his followers are acting accordingly. In this case his role is that of deliverer of God's will through his interactions with the Pharoah, his dissemination of the commandments, and his acting as a judge for the people. Moses consistently favored his relationship with God, sometimes to what was seen as the detriment of the Israelites (e.g., in Exodus 16 the Israelites believed that Moses and Aaron had condemned them to die in the desert). On a much less dramatic scale, leaders in the workplace position themselves in a similar manner. While many may be able to balance the roles, some may willingly or unwillingly adopt the predominant role of leader or member, contributing resources in one direction to the detriment of the other.

## Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

**Job Satisfaction** – An individual's assessment of job favorability (Judge et al., 2017)

**Leader-leader exchange (LLX)** – The relationship quality that exists between two leaders, or a leader and their supervisor (Farooq & Tripathi, 2021)

**Leader-member exchange (LMX)** – The quality of the relationship between the leader and follower (Martin et al., 2016).

**LMX Differentiation (LMXD)** – The process of leaders developing different quality relationships with individual followers (Martin et al., 2018).

**Middle Manager** – An individual that operates within the workplace hierarchy between top management and frontline supervision (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2019).

**Resource Drain** - A theory that suggests resources such as time and energy are limited (Malik et al., 2021).

## Significance of the Study

This study will play a significant role in expanding how LMX theory is researched, as well as take the next step in advancing understanding in the multi-level reality of LMX in organizations today. Historically, LMX has primary been viewed from the perspective of the member, with a focus on how the relationship and resources attained from the manager relate to various facets of employee attitudes and behaviors. By shifting the attention from the member and to the leader, the study will increase understanding of how the leader themselves may be impacted by multiple relationships they must balance.

This study will also extend LMX from the single dyadic relationship, into the next

phase of the organizational hierarchy, a larger leadership chain. Combining previous literature of LMX and LLX, this research will look to connect the two dyads into a single transference of relationship quality through the hub that is the middle manager. While previous research has explored how LLX can influence the members' attitudes (Herdman et al., 2017), it does so without considering the direct impact on the individual in the middle. Building literature in this capacity will then allow for a more applicable understanding of how LMX can be leveraged in the practical setting. Depending on the results of this study, organizational psychologists, human resource professionals, and organizational leaders can better understand where the focus of relationship quality must go in order to maximize the return on investment. For example, if middle managers with strong upward LLX are found to have stronger downward LMX, more attention can be given to the leader-direct supervisor relationship with the goal of trickling down benefits. However, if it is found that middle managers are largely able to serve as a buffer of poor high-level relationships (low quality upward relationship with high quality downward relationship), the focus can be shifted to the lowest common denominator and better preparing the middle manager directly may be the best approach. Currently, the understanding of how LMX applies in the bigger organizational picture is still extremely limited and is seemingly intended to investigate the individual level relationship. Further research may be able to broaden the scope and allow for group-level (or even multi-group) analysis and intervention.

## Summary

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory continues to be an important leadership theory. This focus on relationship quality and its many benefits may prove especially

useful given the uncertain future of workplace dynamics after the COVID-19 pandemic. Applying this theory to an underrepresented population pool will also advance the understanding of how middle managers may act as a conduit for the allocation of resources while simultaneously balancing their own competing interests of where to place effort in the development of relationships. This unique dual-role position leads to individuals acting as both members and leaders in separate dyadic relationships, all of which require focused attention to succeed. This study seeks to explore how the perception of both upward and downward LMX relate to the individual's job satisfaction. The findings of this study have the potential to not only expand upon current LMX literature but opens the possibility of future research that continues to develop group- and organizational-level understanding of how dyadic relationships fit into the broader context of the organizational structure.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Overview**

In their book, Bauer and Erdogan (2016) reviewed the number of published articles that have featured LMX since the 1970s. Interest has steadily grown over this time, culminating with over 55% of the articles having been written since 2010. This trend of increasing interest in LMX continues today, as ideas of equity and empathy in the workplace have brought more attention to workplace relationships than in the past. This chapter will review the existing literature regarding LMX and the surrounding concepts, highlighting areas of research surrounding the formation of leader and follower roles, job satisfaction in middle managers, social exchange and workplace relations, and the Biblical literature that helps create the existing LMX framework.

A challenge of reviewing LMX is the current lack of a clearly refined process in which LMX develops (Bauer & Erdogan, 2016). This difficulty likely stems from the nature of LMX itself, in that it focuses on relationships. Often, relationships (even in the workplace) can be messy. They ebb and flow, stagnating or growing depending on constantly changing paradigm shifts in the business structure or general workplace climate. Subtle struggles for power and assertiveness within a team (something evolutionary psychologists may argue is ingrained in the human psyche) can have long-lasting ramifications on aspects of relationship building such as confiding information (Slepian & Kirby, 2018), which can ultimately affect relationships. The goal of this literature review is to peel back the layers, reveal the foundation of LMX in its current state, identify gaps in the literature, and build upon this foundation.

**Description of Search Strategy**

A variety of databases were used in this study. These include APA PsycNet, EBSCO, PsycTests, and ProQuest. Research conducted in the last five years was emphasized in the original search strategy. The search was expanded to include some articles older than five years if they contained unique and seminal work. Terms included in the search were leader-member exchange, LMX, LMXD, job satisfaction, social exchange theory, conservation of resources, role theory, social hierarchies, organizational hierarchy, organizational power, workplace attitudes, organizational relationships, work relationships, and middle managers.

Biblical research was conducted utilizing two approaches. A word study procedure was used, focusing on the words lead and leader, and then expanding into the context in which they were used. A second approach involved reviewing Biblical stories and verses that relate directly with individuals who took on either a direct leadership role (e.g., David, Moses), or a proxy-leader role (e.g., Noah). Only the *English Standard Bible* (2001/2016) translation was used when conducting this research.

**Review of Literature**

**Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction, or the individual's assessment of job favorability, is one of the most researched job attitudes in organizational research (Judge et al., 2017). Job satisfaction can be measured either as a singular overall level of satisfaction with a job or role or can be measured through various facets of satisfaction that relate to different aspects of one's work. These facets can include working conditions, pay, job demands, and workplace relationships (Lepold et al., 2018). While these two types of assessments

are commonly assumed to be measuring the same concept, Ironson et al. (1989) found that the summation of multiple facets is not the same as global satisfaction but is more accurately describing the satisfaction with that specific component of work.

Several factors have been found to contribute to global satisfaction, a few of which are related to relationships. The status of an upward relationship with a supervisor, has been found to be correlated with job satisfaction. Negative outcomes can occur through direct, abusive supervision (Peltokorpi & Ramaswami, 2021) as well as indirectly through a perceived lack of supervisor support (Wnuk, 2017). Less research has been devoted to looking at how subordinate behaviors influence leader satisfaction, although there has been research on subordinate-supervisor bullying (Patterson et al., 2018). However, beyond direct behaviors, the power disparity that exists between employees and supervisors may attribute to the dearth in research on satisfaction correlations in an upward direction (i.e., subordinate influencing supervisor). Peltokorpi and Ramaswami (2021) found that the greater the power distance, the less negative effect abusive supervision had on subordinate job satisfaction. In the context of upward and downward relationships, power distance does not exist on the same spectrum. When power distance is operationalized in studies such as this, it operates on a scale from near-peer to large power distances. In a real-world organization, power exists more on a continuum with multiple individuals falling onto different levels of power. Still, evidence has shown that working relationships do affect job satisfaction (Lepold et al., 2018), though further research would be required to understand how subordinates' attitudes and behaviors can impact supervisor attitudes.

Beyond relationships, time also plays a role in job satisfaction. Riza et al. (2018)

found that over time, when spent in the same organization, job satisfaction decreased. Interestingly, job satisfaction does tend to increase with age, so long as an employee periodically transitions from one organization to another. In other words, age is positively associated with satisfaction, but tenure is negatively associated. The LMX will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but it is worth noting that while LMX is not necessarily directly impacted by time, longer relationships provide for more opportunity to build trust which can enhance LMX (Gabel-Shemueli, & Riva Zaferson, 2021). This is not to say that relationship tenure is correlated with LMX (Schyns et al., 2005). This does create a bit of a paradox in that tenure is negatively correlated with job satisfaction, but tenure may be necessary to build a stronger relationship. Additional factors such as work-life balance (Chen et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018), intra-organizational change (Eib et al., 2021; Pick & Teo, 2016), and job resources (Scanlan & Still, 2019) have also been found to affect job satisfaction.

The reason job satisfaction is so widely researched is in part due to the significant ramifications that job satisfaction can have. Job satisfaction was found to be strongly inter-connected with employee burnout and turnover intentions (Scanlan & Still, 2019), as well as correlated with organizational commitment and psychological ownership (Mustafa et al., 2021). There is also evidence that job satisfaction is related to performance. In an extensive review, Judge et al. (2001) found a moderate correlation between the two variables, though they recognized a lack of agreement amongst researchers on how they interact (e.g., does job satisfaction lead to better performance or vice versa?). In a more applicable sense, Kessler et al.'s (2020) study indicated that while satisfaction may not have any immediate implications for organization performance,

there are clear long-term benefits that manifest themselves over time.

**Middle Managers and Role Theory**

One of the challenges in the study of middle managers stems not from a lack of definition, but inconsistency in its application. Broadly speaking, a middle manager is any management position within the organizational hierarchy that operates below top-level management and above bottom-level supervision (Wooldridge et al., 2008). However, Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) note that very few studies actually emphasize the "*middleness*" of the middle manager's role. Instead, studies look at middle managers in terms of their rank and remove the focus from their relationality. In other words, the *middle* component is removed, and they simply become a stratum of leader or subordinate, instead of what they truly are—both. The real-world impact that middle managers play in the organization comes down to how they identify themselves and the role they take on. This is especially true considering that managers may be asked to *lead*, or may not lead anyone at all, a distinction highlighted by Rost (1991).

In this respect, role theory suggests that individuals hold certain expectations of their roles and subsequent behaviors based on their social position within the structure (Biddle, 1986). Middle managers must meet the ambiguous needs of being both a leader and a follower. While Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) pointed out the lack of definition in the operationalization of middle management in research, Heyden et al. (2016) demonstrated how middle managers and top managers provide unique roles. In their study, they compared how change was accepted by employees when initiated and executed by middle managers and top managers (e.g., initiated by the middle manager and executed by the top manager). They found that change was best accepted and

implemented when initiated by the middle manager and executed by the top manager. This is due to the belief of the team that the middle manager has a higher cost involved in dealing with the change than top level management. This cost includes learning the new system themselves and being more directly impacted by the fallout; in other words, middle managers identifying as being closer to the frontline staff leads to the general expectation that they have more skin in the game. However, this is not always the case, as organizational identification can impact the proximity in which middle managers view themselves in comparison with their subordinates. Organizational identification here is how willing an employee is to identify as part of the larger organization, as opposed to identifying more as an individual (Tarakci et al., 2018). Middle managers, dependent upon their organizational identification, respond more strongly to varying stimuli, either on the organizational or individual level.

Questions still exist surrounding how middle managers *typically* identify within the organization. Multiple studies (Currie & Procter, 2005; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Splitter et al., 2021) have shown that ambiguous expectations from top managers can lead to inconsistencies in strategic leader-level involvement from middle managers. This potentially magnifies how middle managers view themselves and alter the roles they inhabit. In two complementary studies, both Falls and Allen (2020) and Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) investigate middle managers in academia (deans). Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) discuss the three major functions of middle managers, which are to act as performance drivers, impotent managers, and umbrella-protectors, dependent upon the direction of influence (upward or downward as either superior or subordinate, as the driving force of action). Interestingly, they found that the umbrella-protector, or the

buffer between their superior and subordinates, was the most commonly identified perspective. In this role, the middle manager is not creating or implementing change themselves but is instead reducing the impact of change coming from higher in the hierarchy. In this context, the middle manager is acting from a subordinate role. This predominantly subordinate functioning is challenged by the academic middle managers themselves who claim to associate themselves more strongly in a leader role. While able to flex to a subordinate role, they report struggling in doing so (Falls & Allen, 2020). While this can be viewed paradoxically, it may be better suited as further evidence of the lack of clarity that exists in the role formation of middle managers. Seemingly, these are experienced professionals who recognize and seek to identify as leaders in the organization, but the demands of the position may often cause a dissociation between expectation and reality.

**Social Hierarchies in the Workplace**

The workplace is inherently comprised of a hierarchical structure in which a dominant figure sits atop the pyramid. This complete control is sometimes hampered down with the presence of a board and the necessary inputs of stakeholders required to maintain economic viability within the greater global market. But when looking at an individual organization, the hierarchy can be made through both formal (structural) and informal (expertise) means. Qu et al. (2017) argue that the formation of dominance hierarchies throughout society is biologically ingrained in our species. It is in the primitive form of dominance hierarchies that we can begin to understand how LMX, or at least the broader social relationships in a workplace develop. Research in both primates and human children have demonstrated that there are innate means by which organisms

vie for more dominant positions in the hierarchy (Qu et al., 2017). The question becomes, how do individuals in controlled and civilized settings, such as an office space, compete with others to move up the ladder?

Ketterman and Maner (2021) investigated the differing techniques of gaining social influence through dominance (forcefulness) or prestige, the two most commonly used tactics. Since higher positions in the hierarchy (work or otherwise) come with the benefit of more access to resources (Qu et al., 2017) and are used as representations of judged success (Hill & Buss, 2006), it can be suggested that humans desire a more prominent place in the social hierarchy. Based on this presupposition, dominance and prestige will then play a role in developing and leveraging relationships and previously acquired power. Regarding a middle manager, the preferred influencing mechanism they use will undoubtedly impact the direction and success with which they exert their efforts. While asserting dominance in the upward direction through measures such as workplace bullying is possible (Björklund et al., 2019), it is less common. The nature of the vertical dyad suggests that one individual is already in a position of authority or dominance (in this case the top manager) and, likely, more tact is then necessary to navigate upwards influence than downward.

Where hierarchy differs in the workplace is in the role and overall desired outcomes of the individual. Middle managers, playing that *middle* role, are looking to create a cohesive environment (Petraki & Ramayanti, 2018). Therefore, despite more strongly associating themselves with organizational leadership, they still carry the umbrella protecting the lower tiers of the structure. The role of the middle manager often becomes connecting the top and bottom of the hierarchy and maintaining relationships in

both directions to further their own interests and advancement (Harding et al., 2014).

Taking the same evolutionary perspective used in social hierarchy research, the notion

that middle managers identify more strongly with the powerful manager role should be

no surprise, as they can leverage their position for power and prestige. In the modern

workplace, dominance and prestige are still viable factors in career advancement and

individual positioning; however, the recognition of benefits from reciprocal relationships

is also advantageous for organizational leaders and followers.

      A final consideration in where the middle manager places themselves in the

hierarchy again considers how the individual identifies, or even the group in which they

identify. This implying, if the middle manager more strongly identifies as a subordinate

versus a leader, they may self-impose restrictions in their flexibility within the hierarchy

and may unconsciously alter the direction in which they place their effort (either up the

hierarchy or down it). Made famous in the 1970s by psychologist Tajfel, the minimal

group paradigm suggests that in-groups are favored even if the group was assembled in

an arbitrary manner (Brown, 2020). Transferring this paradigm to the larger hierarchy,

how individuals then socially identify and group themselves certainly matters in

behaviors and beliefs, whether those groupings are necessarily founded in reality of

position or merely perspective. Where middle managers place themselves in a group

(more strongly associating with the subordinates or leaders) may influence which they

consider the more meaningful in-group. These in-groups and outgroups occur at multiple

levels, even influencing LMX (Baker & Omilion-Hodges, 2013). The minimal group

paradigm not only demonstrates the importance of social grouping/interactions amongst

individuals, but also clearly shows that the quality of interactions is affected by the

perception of relatedness between individuals.

Social creatures that organize themselves in a hierarchical manner must decide what behaviors are worth engaging or refraining from to move up within the hierarchy (Cummins, 1996). In the context of work hierarchies, this would come in the form of exchanging positive and beneficial interactions and exchanges with one's superior. In return, the leader may reciprocate these behaviors, ultimately leading to repeated social exchanges that both hierarchies and individual dyads are built. This is where social exchange theory becomes prominent in the discussion of LMX.

**Social Exchange Theory**

The overarching narrative surrounding social exchange theory (SET) is the idea that workplace relationships are formed due to repeated and reciprocal sharing of resources that are proven to be advantageous for the individual (Chernyak-Hai & Edna, 2018; Yoshikawa et al., 2018). This mutual cohabitation within (coworker exchange) and between (LMX) hierarchical levels within the organizational structure links the importance of understanding social hierarchies to the concept of social exchange. Whether or not an individual is actively seeking to rise through the ranks, social exchange is a primary means of integration. The SET also acts as a foundational pillar of LMX, as it also focuses on the relationship between the two entities, only it is not limited to a vertical dyadic structure.

Chernyak-Hai and Edna (2018) recently discussed the stability that has existed surrounding the SET, despite modern organizations dramatically changing since its inception in the 1950s. Specifically, they argue that the modern workplace conditions (less direct leader-employee interactions) and employee characteristics (higher levels of

autonomy and cultural diversity) will inevitably have had an impact on factors such as trust, influence, and support. With the conditions and characteristics being interrelated, the shift in relationships must be accompanied by a shift, or modernization, of the SET. Regardless, SET fundamentally views the social exchanges as a passing of potential resources from one individual to another, or at a minimum increased social standing (e.g., trust) with a leader lends to more resources made available to the member (Schoorman et al., 2016). Resources are vital to both standing in a hierarchy, as a means of exchange, and ultimately a crucial component of LMX.

**Conservation of Resources**

In recent years, the conservation of resources (COR) theory has been expanded to include a number of material and non-material resources that can be considered crucial to employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. Originally constructed by Hobfoll (1998) as a theoretical framework for understanding how individuals attain and conserve resources to combat stressors, COR has quickly been applied to a number of settings and outcomes. Objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energy were the original four categories of resources and continue to be shown as essential in modern working environments (Prapanjaronensin et al., 2017). The resources themselves are fairly vague and have been expanded to include internal and external factors. Some internal factors, including engagement (Bai et al., 2021; Wu & Lee, 2020), resilience (Bardoel & Drago, 2021), and emotional intelligence (Jabbar et al., 2020) all play a role in how stressors in the workplace are internalized and affect the individual. While some resources can be externally provided, such as time and money (Prapanjaronensin et al., 2017), empowerment (Zhou et al., 2018) and knowledge sharing (Wu & Lee, 2020;

Prapanjaronensin et al., 2017), external factors are more frequently investigated as the causes of stressors that force the exhaustion of available resources. Gossip, poor or abusive leadership practices, and job insecurity all put an additional toll on the individual employee (Debus & Unger, 2017; Fatima et al., 2018; Jabbar et al., 2020; Ye, He, & Sun, 2021).

Job complexity has also been explored as a significant stressor in the workplace (Bai et al., 2021) and can have differential effects dependent on the individual's resources. As energy (the resource investigated) is depleted through the task of job crafting, the individual's self-image, engagement, burnout, and job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2017) can all be impacted. This raises clear concerns for those in the ambiguous role of middle management. As previously discussed, it can be challenging for middle managers to clearly recognize defined roles, as they balance both the strategic and practical side of the organization. This also leads to the consideration that resources typically given to the middle manager from top management are not necessarily for their own consumption but may be for reallocation to their subordinates. For example, suppose that top management provides information to the middle manager to disseminate to their staff. The initial sharing of information provides the middle manager with a useful resource (Prapanjaronensin et al., 2017). However, the middle manager must than deplete their own resources (time and energy) ensuring that they received the information and properly shared it with all of those who required it. Unlike traditional dyadic explorations, reality exists outside of a vacuum, and multiple relationships must be considered. Depending on the structure of the organization, the time required for a top manager to pass information to the middle manager is exponentially magnified by the

number of subordinates who must subsequently be taught this new knowledge. While the

initial sharing of knowledge may be viewed as an additional resource, it (like many other

resources) may come at the expense of other resources. This highlights the *conservative*

nature of resources, as individuals ideally wish to conserve them for times of need. By

nature of being in the middle of the structure, middle managers may have access to more

resources, but will also utilize them at a greater rate.

This also comes with the caveat that poor leadership has been demonstrated to

reduce intrinsic resources through the addition of external stressors (Fatima et al., 2018;

Jabbar et al., 2020). In the same way that LMX has been scarcely researched from the

leader perspective, the leader's perspective of COR in the organization is also neglected.

This means there is unknown interaction in the middle ground, especially in cases of poor

top-level leadership. The middle manager may not be getting any added resources from

top management, while simultaneously being required to pass on resources to their own

subordinates to ensure their success. Additionally, in the same way that poor leadership

was shown to reduce job satisfaction, Wright and Bonett (2007) suggested that job

satisfaction itself is a resource that can mitigate stressors in the workplace. This can

especially be seen when looking at the various facets of job satisfaction. If poor

leadership restricts both satisfaction and additional resources, it is possible that the

middle manager enters a figurative downward spiral in which a lack of one resource

exhausts another, and a trend begins to form.

Halbesleben et al. (2014) discusses the issue of primacy of resource loss,

suggesting that losing resources is psychologically more harmful than gaining resources

is helpful. When looking at resources a leader controls such as time or energy, the leader

must determine if giving up those resources is truly worth it. Like all individuals, middle managers need to make calculated decisions regarding where to invest their resources in order to maximize return (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2001). How a middle manager then copes with the variety with which resources are being pulled, and how they ultimately allocate them, becomes a struggle of competing interests. Do they see themselves as a leader with a propensity to climb the organizational hierarchy? Do they favor the relationship with certain individuals they feel maximize their investment? Or do they have some alternative motive that guides their use of resources? All of these considerations may be influenced by the individuals involved or the context in which resource exchange is occurring.

Combining SET and the fundamental concepts of COR, the individual dyads begin to show themselves as the building blocks of hierarchical maintenance in a social group. When applied to the workplace, LMX theory acts in a manner in which all of these concepts are synthesized. Utilizing individual role identification, hierarchical placement, social exchanges, resource conservation and acquisition, LMX generally creates a starting point where the formation and quality of relationships can be assessed.

### Leader-member Exchange

Leader-member exchange's (LMX) surge in popularity has not only led to garnering more interest in research but has subsequently increased the amount of theoretical variability in the nuances of the relationship between leaders and members itself. Overall, LMX is best defined as the quality of the relationship between a leader and member (or supervisor and subordinate; Martin et al., 2016). This focus on the relationship itself not only differentiates LMX from other leadership theories (e.g., neo-

charismatic theories such as transformational and transactional leadership; Bauer &
Erdogan, 2016), but also recognizes that every LMX dyad is going to be unique (Lee et
al., 2019). In one of the few meta-analyses conducted on LMX, Dulebohn et al. (2012)
discussed the myriad of antecedents significant to relationship development and
outcomes, including factors such as individual personality, competence, and affect. In a
more recent review, affect was reiterated as an important component of LMX, although
LMX was found to explain variance in outcomes beyond simply liking each other
(Dulebohn et al., 2016).

      To understand how LMX operates in the workplace, role theory, SET, and COR
should be combined within the context of an organizational structure. Each of these
theories provides a unique component of a leader-follower relationship, so that together
they create a working baseline of understanding in how and why these dyads exist. The
individuals must first establish their role and identity within the organization, and this
forms the baseline relationship as the two parties become tied to one another within the
larger group. The SET then describes the type of relationship they have; whether that is
low or high quality depends on individual and organizational antecedents. The SET and
COR, in the context of LMX, are inherently connected. This is, in order to exchange,
there must be resources worth exchanging. Even at its most basic, LMX can still function
as a purely economic exchange (Dulebohn et al., 2012). An employee performs some
tasks that an employer needs accomplished and in exchange they are paid (this type of
relationship would fall on the extremely low-quality end of the spectrum). As discussed,
COR works on the notion that individuals are motivated to conserve and attain resources.
Within a hierarchy, this means that individuals will look to build exchange relationships

with those who they perceive to have resources worth attaining. Combined, SET explains the *how* and COR explains the *why*. Within the framework created by role adoption, clear lines of exchange are created. It is worth noting that these relationships are not limited to leaders and followers, as coworker exchange has also been studied in the organizational setting (Sherony & Green, 2002).

**LMX as it Relates to Other Leadership Theories and Behaviors**

The LMX theory exists in a particular sphere outside of the traditional focus on leader behaviors and traits. For instance, a leader who exists within the dyad can still be described as a transformational, transactional, or servant leader based on their behaviors, yet these qualities do not directly translate to the relationship itself, as a transformational leader can still have high- and low-quality relationships with their followers. The LMX theory is then able to integrate other leadership characteristics as a component of the relationship or can be used to supplement the outcomes of other theories. For example, Young et al. (2021) observed the outcomes of transactional leadership practices with the LMX quality acting as a mediating variable for contextual performance outcomes. What they found was that LMX and employee empowerment (a concept often written in connection with LMX; Audenaert et al., 2017) determined the direction of transactional leadership on employee performance. When LMX was low, transactional leadership decreased the intrinsic motivations of accomplishing work, reducing the empowerment over the work the employee felt. Conversely, high LMX altered the perception of the transactions into a more rewarding state. In this study, transactional leadership and LMX were viewed as two completely different entities. Similar mediating and moderating studies have found that LMX is essential for maximizing the benefits of servant

leadership (Newman et al., 2017) and transformational leadership (Nandedkar & Brown, 2018). Since every leadership theory still inherently requires some level of leader-follower relationship, LMX then becomes a supplemental theory in virtually all leadership studies, whether or not it is explicitly discussed.

These studies demonstrate the utility of LMX as it compartmentalizes the leader action, the follower outcome, and the leader-follower relationship as individual entities within the bigger picture. Currently, little research has been conducted on the LMX development process itself (Bauer & Erdogan, 2016), but it is possible that many of the leader behaviors central to other leadership theories contribute to the strengthening of these dyadic relationships. This remains one of the challenges in LMX research, and one of the aspects that make it such a dynamic theory. The LMX quality is not necessarily contingent upon particular leadership styles and behaviors, hence why LMX can be integrated with virtually any behavior-based leadership theory. When looking at the relationship overall, a number of variables will contribute to the overall exchange.

The LMX quality has also been associated with the expectations of leaders on follower outcomes. Most notably, a leader's expectation of follower performance seems to be influenced by the Pygmalion effect, or self-fulfilling prophecy (Veestraeten et al., 2021). This reveals that LMX not only acts in an action-reaction pattern between the leader and follower, but also relies heavily on the perceptions of the leader singularly (again, signifying the influence the leader holds in the relationship). If a leader expects the follower will perform to a higher level, they are given the resources needed to achieve that level of success. These additional resources can act as a tool to develop LMX earlier in the timeline of the dyad. Similar to competency (Dulebohn et al., 2012), expectations

can be presumed early in the relationship, either excelling or hindering the trust necessary to grow. It also creates the opportunity to either meet, exceed, or underperform based on these preconceived notions. With leader beliefs holding so much weight in the beginning stages of LMX development, the perceptions of the leader (and subsequent follower responses) may affect job satisfaction. Ok and Park (2018) found that job satisfaction is associated with met satisfaction, and those with the largest drops in met-expectations overtime will be more dissatisfied. If leaders create expectations for their followers and those expectations are not met, the leader will likely become dissatisfied with the employee and the relationship will suffer.

**Antecedents of LMX**

*Subordinate Characteristics*

Subordinate characteristics influence LMX in how they play a role in the behaviors of the individual, as well as in how their characteristics are perceived by the other participant. In Dulebohn et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis, the authors highlighted a number of traits that impacted LMX. Factors such as locus of control, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness were all seen to be positively associated with LMX quality. Additional characteristics have also come to light in recent years, as concepts such as employee mindfulness (Mulligan et al., 2021) and equity sensitivity (Han et al., 2018) have been shown to play a role. All these characteristics suggest that individuals who are more agreeable, benevolent, and dependable will typically have stronger relationships with their leaders.

This does not mean that subordinate characteristics only have intrinsic value in LMX development; studies have also demonstrated that a leader's perception of follower

traits and abilities also influence how LMX grows. This is most seen with perceived

competence and ability. Dulebohn et al. (2012) and Martin et al. (2010) each discussed

the notion that how a leader perceives the member's ability will influence the

development of LMX, especially in the early stages of the relationship. This was again

seen in a recent study in which member personality was a controlled variable and only

their performance changed. In these instances, a leader's changes in LMX ratings were

dependent upon the perceived performance and not due to any altered traits otherwise

(Henson & Beehr, 2018). As Dulebohn et al. (2012) argues, this is caused by a leader's

willingness to provide challenging tasks and new responsibilities to individuals they

believe capable of successfully accomplishing them. This, like many other aspects of

LMX/relationships, becomes its own cycle. As leaders perceive lower capability in

followers, they provide less opportunity. Less opportunity limits the ability for LMX to

grow, effectively stunting the relationship early in the process.

### *Leader Characteristics*

Similarly, leader characteristics also play a significant role in LMX. As

mentioned previously, the power disparity in the relationship lends to the consideration

that leaders have more control over the growth of the relationship than subordinates

(Dulebohn et al., 2012). This means that understanding leader traits and behaviors is a

crucial component of LMX, though it remains much less emphasized than member

qualities (Martin et al., 2010). Despite this, research has shown that the same personality

traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness that mattered for members also contribute

from the leader side. Specifically, these traits have been positively associated with

empowered leadership that enhances LMX (Jada & Mukhopadhyay, 2019). Leader

competency also affects LMX, as the leader's competency in-role influences the relationship between trust and LMX (i.e., leader's higher trust in the member partnered with more competence leads to higher member perceived LMX; Byun et al., 2017).

Leadership behaviors are core antecedents of LMX, and typically are filtered down into two overarching leadership styles: transformational and transactional (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Transformational leadership behaviors have consistently been viewed to positively influence leader-member relationships and member outcomes (Labrague et al., 2020; Nandedkar & Brown, 2018; Wu & Lee, 2020). Transactional leadership and its relationship with LMX have been previously discussed, but it is worth noting that within the reward-giving context at the center of transactional leadership, the more members believe a leader holds control over rewards, the stronger the perceived LMX is (Aryee & Chen, 2006). This demonstrates the value of resources within the context of LMX perception and development, as employees were more likely to initiate (or contribute to) relationships with leaders who were seen as exerting more control over the allocation of resources.

One last subset of leadership behaviors that is often studied with LMX are abusive behaviors. While there is ample research that looks at abusive supervision, the context in which they do so is not as direct as may be expected. Instead of investigating abuse's influence on LMX, much of the research looks at the buffering effect that strong LMX has on the effects of abuse on member outcomes. In this respect, the importance of LMX can be seen as it often mitigates much of the negative outcomes of abuse (Agarwal, 2019; Lyons et al., 2019; Mackey et al., 2020; Pan & Lin, 2018). It is likely that the subsequent outcomes (though reduced) will subsequently result in lowering LMX

overtime.

### *Interactional Characteristics*

Another set of characteristics worth considering are those that relate to the

relationship between the leader and member, instead of individuals themselves. In this

capacity, perhaps the most studied aspect of relationships is positive affect or liking.

While liking and LMX are conceptually similar, Dulebohn et al. (2016) found that they

do in fact each provide a unique insight into the leader-member relationship. They

hypothesize that LMX represents the dyadic exchange, while liking is still an

individually-held attitude (e.g., a subordinate can either like or dislike their supervisor,

but this feeling does not need to be shared by the opposing party). This differentiates the

two concepts, though they do tend to overlap in measurement and some limited

redundancy.

There is also evidence to support that when the leader and member share certain

characteristics that increase perceived similarity (i.e., demographically), LMX will also

tend to be of higher quality (Dewanto, 2020). The demographic (dis)similarity also plays

a role when there is inconsistency in beliefs/attitudes between a leader and member.

Lianidou et al. (2021) found that demographic and positional status influenced the impact

that these dissimilarities had on LMX. Specifically, when the individual was from a

perceived lower status demographic (e.g., African-American women) and was in the

lesser positional status (the member as opposed to the leader), any perceived dissimilarity

had a greater impact on LMX than if the member status had been of a higher level.

Shared similarities extend beyond the structural and physical, and studies have also

shown that variance in LMX can also be attributed to personality (Dust et al., 2021;

Wijaya, 2019). Some researchers have argued that it is not the actual similarities that influence LMX, but the *perceived* similarities.

It is commonly believed that trust is an essential part of leader-member relationships and the development of LMX (Dulebohn et al, 2012). Trust in a leader-member relationship can have significant outcomes, including ratings of leadership effectiveness, increased satisfaction, and belief in leaders, as well as behavioral outcomes such as increased knowledge sharing (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). To demonstrate the comprehensiveness of trust's function in LMX, Nienabar et al. (2015) investigated the antecedents for trust in leader-member relationships. They found that subordinate characteristics, supervisor characteristics, interpersonal processes, and organizational characteristics all factored into the trust in a relationship. Many of these characteristics and processes overlap with those discussed regarding LMX. Hirvi et al. (2021) also found that trust in relationships can also be dependent upon other people (outside of the dyad) and specific social events. They also found that leaders and members view the relationship differently, which leads to different points of emphasis in the development of trust. Where members are more focused on the emotional and affective components of a working relationship, leaders tend to have a more objective view, prioritizing the cognitive and formal aspect of relationships. This provides insight into the differing perspectives of LMX, as the less vulnerable party (the leader who controls more of the power) may see the relationship from a more utilitarian perspective. The question becomes how individuals in middle management roles view the different dyads (upwards and downwards), and where and in whom they opt to place their trust.

**LMX and Job Satisfaction**

High quality LMX has been found to positively affect employee satisfaction

(Dulebohn et al., 2012). It does this through both direct and indirect means. In a direct

sense, high quality LMX is typically indicative of more opportunities for growth and

preferential treatment/recognition, items commonly associated with theories such as

Herzberg's two-factor theory (Maidani, 1991). This theory suggests that certain aspects

of work act as motivating factors (factors that increase motivation and satisfaction with

one's job), or as hygiene factors (factors that decrease satisfaction). In that same vein,

working relationships themselves positively contribute to the job satisfaction of

individuals in the workplace (Li et al., 2018). Harris et al. (2009) also found that when

LMX was high, employees were more satisfied and had lower turnover intentions, even

when they did not feel motivated and/or empowered. This demonstrates that LMX, or the

leader-member relationship itself, can act as a means of satisfaction.

Indirectly, LMX is positively correlated to several additional variables that

contribute to individual satisfaction. In their LMX satisfaction construct, Malik et al.

(2015) not only found a direct relationship between LMX and satisfaction, but also

explored how increased employee motivation and empowerment can indirectly increase

job satisfaction. Beyond indirect effects, psychological capital was also found to be a

mediator in the LMX-satisfaction relationship. This means that high LMX increases

psychological capital which in turn will improve job satisfaction as well as life

satisfaction, which highlights the significance of LMX in overall health through the

spillover effect (Liao et al., 2017).

While there is abundant research regarding member outcomes, very little research

has been used to examine leader outcomes of high quality LMX. Erdeji et al. (2016) found that the contribution of leaders to LMX could influence the formation of attitudes within the team that would ultimately impact the leader's job satisfaction. They proposed that a leader who does not contribute to LMX will recognize that members are not meeting their desired expectations. This dissatisfaction may be relayed (by the member or the leader) to other members, creating a rippling effect throughout the unit. The lowering relationship quality of single or multiple dyads may have some degree of consequence on the leader's own satisfaction. Conversely, Wilson et al. (2010) listed the resources that are desired from a social exchange (taken from previously existing resource theories): money, goods, services, status, information, and affiliation/friendship. These resources would not be exclusive to followers, and the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), effort, admiration, or useful information are all resources that members can give to leaders that may increase leader job satisfaction.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Volmer et al. (2011), the reciprocal nature of the LMX-satisfaction relationship was identified. Measuring the two variables at two different times, the researchers found that each was predictive of the other from Time 1 to Time 2. This means that high LMX leads to increased satisfaction, which in turn will lead again to better LMX. This is perhaps due to the increase in positive attitudes and opportunities that increase the leader and member's available resources, which can be reinvested in the social exchange. As more resources become available, LMX is more desirable, and the circle continues. What Volmer et al.'s (2011) study did reveal is that there is a positive correlation in both directions, where previously almost no research had been directed towards understanding satisfaction's effect on LMX.

**LMX and Other Associated Outcomes**

A few other outcomes have been associated with high quality LMX, and because many may provide an indirect relationship between LMX and satisfaction, they are worth considering. As briefly mentioned, empowerment is a noteworthy variable as it has been found to not only be a component of high quality LMX, but also mediates the LMX-satisfaction relationship (Aryee & Chen, 2006). Empowerment is an important concept not only for employees, but especially for middle managers. To empower lower-level staff, first the middle manager must feel empowered themselves. Denham et al. (1997) hypothesized that the role middle managers play may have led to resistance when it comes to empowering policies (though they rate it as overall beneficial). This is possibly due to the perception that, as employees become more empowered, middle managers' own role and importance will be diminished. With that in mind, there is a possibility that the amount of empowerment that a middle manager feels from their direct supervisor may positively influence that level of LMX. However, the empowerment may not flow from top to bottom if the middle manager resists and actively seeks to maintain control. In the context of this study, it is possible that a middle manager who feels empowered may rate LMX as higher with their supervisor, but the transference of that empowerment may never manifest and therefore have no real impact on LMX with their own subordinates.

High quality LMX has also been positively associated with job engagement (Breevaart et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017; Obuobisa-Darko & Kwame, 2019) and performance (Bugvi & Wafa, 2018; Judge et al, 2001; Martin et al., 2016; Mazur, 2012). These variables can also be viewed as reciprocal in nature with LMX. If individuals are

engaged and performing well, the return that a leader can receive (in the form of productivity and effort) warrants an increase in attention and opportunity (i.e., increased LMX). Conversely, if an individual is obtaining opportunities and resources, they can perform at a higher level. Like satisfaction, these variables seem to work in a cyclical fashion, where they both can act as the instigator. Better LMX leads to more engagement and stronger performance, which subsequently leads again to better LMX.

It is possible that this same relationship may exist between LMX and innovation (Garg & Dhar, 2017) and commitment (López-Ibort et al., 2018), but so far there is only correlational data that shows the variables may be associated. As leaders see innovative thinkers, they may again provide the resources needed for the employee to advance. High quality LMX has also been found to be positively correlated to health benefits (Tejeda, 2021). LMX has also shown to strongly correlate with attitudes regarding turnover intentions (Kim & Yi, 2018), which aligns with previously discussed two-factor theory, as motivation factors can include working relationship.

**LMX Differentiation**

A key feature of the LMX theory is the recognition that all dyadic relationships will be different from all others. This aspect of LMX is called LMXD (LMXD) (Henderson et al., 2009). In some relationships, LMX quality will be low, defined with limited interpersonal interaction and maintained at the level necessary for basic contractual obligations. On the other hand, high quality LMX relationships contain more mentorship, networking expansion, empowerment, and opportunities for growth. The disparity between these two categorizations, and the degree to which it exists, is the LMXD within a work group.

The properties of LMXD can be operationalized in different ways, making it difficult to understand the extent to which LMXD exists within a group. Martin et al. (2018) discuss how LMXD can be described through three separate properties: central tendency, variation, and relative position. In another review, Buengeler et al. (2021) similarly highlighted the three LMXD constructs as LMX separation, variety, and disparity, which highlight slightly different aspects of LMXD. In Buengeler et al.'s (2021) study, the three variations of LMXD were based on the overall status quo of differentiation within the group. For example, separation may refer to the gap between the in-group and out-group, while disparity was seen as an individual that is dramatically different from the rest of the group. Martin et al. (2018) focused more on the measurement of LMXD itself, as well as the perception of where one falls within the group.

The LMXD in its current capacity has been associated with group and individual level outcomes. Of note, it has been found that leaders can be negatively impacted by high levels of differentiation (Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016). It can also impact leader and subordinate performance and the amount of influence a leader holds and can also stunt a leader's career development and success (Henderson et al., 2009). The LMXD (like LMX) is dynamic, where members transition from in-group to out-group. Individuals are able to recognize this shift and the decreased attention, communication, and opportunity that accompany it (Salehzadeh, 2020). The LMXD has a number of antecedents that stem from leader, subordinate, and group characteristics. Henderson et al. (2009) mention that a leader's relationship with their own direct supervisor can have an impact on LMXD at the group level, yet little time and research has been spent examining this connection.

LMXD has successfully been used to extend LMX from a dyad to a group concept.

The LMXD is an area of research that could potentially be expanded outside of the group and also be recognized as a multi-level consideration. Using central tendency as a measure of the group average, LMX scores could be compared across groups in an organization. Taking this perspective could highlight how differentiation across groups and levels impact the individual tied to both. In the case of middle managers, two distinct relational groups (or directions) are evident based on their role: supervisor and subordinates. Little attention has been given to how these bifurcating relationships are internalized by the individual. One concept that has perhaps gotten closest to investigating the multiple levels of exchange is commonly known as leader-leader exchange.

**LLX or a Different Level of LMX**

Leader-leader exchange (LLX) is the quality of relationships that exist among leaders, or more specifically, the relationship between a leader and their own direct supervisor (Farooq & Tripathi, 2021). The LLX research focuses on these upper-level relationships and how it contributes to valuable topics in the workplace such as empowerment (Byun & Lee, 2021; Lorinkova & Perry, 2017), project performance (Chen & Lin, 2018), and even the lower leaders' group LMXD (Herdman et al., 2017). Farooq and Tripathi (2021) discuss the ramification of low quality LLX on the ability of the leader to access resources which they can further allocate. This notion lends credence to the previous discussion regarding the importance of resources in establishing LMX.

This connection can also be seen through the synthesis of two studies. Sherony and Green (2002) found that if LMX was congruent between two members (i.e., two co-

workers), their co-worker exchange (CWX) was stronger. This was the case whether LMX was high quality or low quality, so long as the two co-workers perceived it was the same (e.g., if two members both saw LMX with their leader as low quality, CWX was stronger than if one had high quality LMX and the other low quality LMX). This may be due to perceived fairness, or to an even distribution of resources. Herdman et al. (2017) found that when LLX was perceived as low quality, disparities in LMX within the team (LMXD) had less of an impact on group outcomes. This again was seen because of the perception of available resources. If LLX was low, the lower-level members would operate under the notion that there were limited resources which would be much more difficult to allocate evenly amongst all members. Therefore, any disparity was seen as a matter of happenstance and less of a purposeful action on behalf of the leader. Together, these two studies paint a more complete picture of how resources, or the perception of the flow of resources, connect the entire relationship network. The relationship upwards (LLX) may have ramifications on the downward relationships (LMX), which in turn influences relationships among members. The interconnectedness seemingly stems from the injection of resources from the top that trickle down. Still, there is the possibility of middle managers forming strong relationships despite the lack of top support through their own upward exchange. How frequently this occurs is still relatively unknown in academia.

An unknown distinction in research is determining when exactly LMX becomes LLX. In most studies that explore LLX, the primary focus—despite the inclusion of leader exchanges—is still member outcomes. This framing of *leader-leader* relationships discusses the quality of the leader's upward relationship in the context of the member

being the ultimate benefactor. If, however, the focus of research was on outcomes of the middle manager only in relation to their supervisor, what distinguishes this role from that of a member? Based on what is currently known, it can be assumed there is no difference, and all of the benefits of LMX would be applicable in these instances too. Where LLX research has failed is it still does not recognize the outcomes of the low-level leader. This, along with the lack of leader focus in traditional LMX research, has created a dearth of knowledge in which virtually nothing is known about how low- and mid-level leaders are affected by exchanges in the context of the organization. Reframing LLX as its own distinct leader-member relationship can help to acknowledge that dyads do not exist within a vacuum, and instead as series of leader-member relationships that create the organizational hierarchy. Understanding how these bidirectional exchanges ultimately influence the satisfaction of the individual in the middle has not been explored in its full context thus far.

<div align="center">**Biblical Foundations of the Study**</div>

**Biblical Perspective of Work and Job Satisfaction**

From a biblical sense, work is inherent in the nature of man. Even in the beginning, God created Adam and took him to the garden to "work it and keep it" (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, Genesis 2:15). Work is then not something that is for convenience or pleasure but is a necessity and requirement of man. The Scripture often emphasizes, or at least acknowledges, the working professions of central figures, such as mentioning the work life of Jesus himself (Mark 6:2-3).

The significance of working is similarly stressed throughout the Bible, seen as a matter of survival but also as a means of ingratiating oneself with a group. In 2

Thessalonians, work is described in great length as a means of payment and belongingness, going so far as to claim that "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10), and for those who do not work "take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14). Paul recognizes the social connection created through work and contribution is as important as the physical necessities (i.e., accessibility to food). In the modern world, the effects of unemployment can still be seen in detrimental health outcomes (Janlert et al., 2015), substance abuse (Compton et al., 2014), and depression (Zuelke et al., 2018). Specifically, in the case of depression, Zuelke et al. (2018) found the increased risk of depression amongst the unemployed cannot be reduced to the lack of material resources. The social aspects of unemployment play a significant role, demonstrating again the importance of work on a psychological level.

These same verses can be interpreted as highlighting the different resources that hold intrinsic value that inspire work effort. These resources are seen throughout the world of motivation psychology, most notably in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Lussier, 2019). The need for food, water, security, and social belonging are all discussed in the Bible as resources provided through work. While the nature of work and the organizational practices have dramatically evolved over the last two millennia, today one's job largely supplies many of these same resources. Work is as crucial now for well-being and resource/need fulfillment as it was when described in Scripture.

Job satisfaction is not explicitly discussed or alluded to in the Bible, making it a much more difficult construct. No doubt serving as one of Jesus' disciples provided more job satisfaction for Matthew than his time as a tax collector, or for Andrew, Peter, James,

and John as fisherman; however, their lives as disciples were still filled with hardships. There are few instances in which the Bible discusses characteristics that could be assumed align with job satisfaction. In Ecclesiastes 2:24 (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016), in the discussion of the vanity of toil, the Bible explains that only those who please God will find enjoyment in their hard work, even if they are not the ones who ultimately prosper from their efforts. The sinner focuses solely on the gathering of wealth and resources and derive no real enjoyment without God. Satisfaction then does not come solely from the resources we produce but in how we use those resources and ultimately whether we work for the glory of the Lord. Another verse worth noting is Philippians 4:11 (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016), where the Apostle Paul expresses his gratitude and declares that he has "learned in whatever situation I am to be content." The idea of being grateful for one's lot is commonplace, but gratefulness and contentment are not the same as satisfaction, though they are perhaps related. This construct of satisfaction can be built from what the Bible describes, but in modern work context a more secular derivation of satisfaction is generally discussed. "How satisfied are you with your job?" is a simpler question when taken at face value, though for some who work heartily for the Lord (as suggested by Colossians 3:23-24), the reason behind the work may be more important to satisfaction than the work itself.

**Biblical Constructs of Leadership**

Leadership is a construct that is developed and demonstrated throughout the Bible. Examples of leaders are almost constantly present (e.g., Moses, Noah, David, Jesus, Paul), all of which encompass the values and characteristics of leaders that are desired in the modern workplace. Beyond providing examples, the Bible also explicitly

describes the qualities of a leader. In Exodus 18:21, Jethro describes what a leader looks like to Moses as a person who is trustworthy, has strong integrity, and fears God. Additionally, leaders should be "above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money," and must maintain their own house well (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, 1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Similarly, followership is emphasized throughout Scripture. Much in line with the previously discussed verses relating to work, followers/workers should not groan at the work they are required to do, but to be content in it (Hebrews 13:17). Much of the time dedicated to discussing leaders and followers is done in the context of the Church. Leaders in these instances are the faith leaders of the time. Still, the Bible is in most aspects transferable to most settings in life. Even in the now mostly secular business world, leaders maintain the same approach towards their own constituency.

The improper use of power by leaders is also mentioned in 1 Peter 5:3, where leaders are told to not domineer over others, but to lead by example. This provides an example of the foundation of a reliance on one another. The leader is not to abuse their position, and conversely the follower is not to take advantage of, or to work against, the leader. This fundamental exchange is the same as in modern LMX theory, as the relationship between the two parties is the focus, as compared to the individual traits.

The overall structure of leadership relations in the Bible is like that found in this broadened version of LMX. In the Bible, leaders act as the liaison and driving force between the will of God and the masses, much as middle managers are positioned between top management and the general work force of an organization. Interpreting how

these middle roles operated in the context of the Scripture, while not completely relatable given the grand scale of action and outcome, does still shed some light on how mid-level leaders must cope with relationships working in multiple directions.

**Biblical Construct of LMX**

Expressing LMX through Scripture and its teaching is difficult to justify, given the grand scale at which one's relationship with God exists, especially when being compared to that of a workplace. Yet it is a worthwhile pursuit to examine LMX in the biblical context, as it still provides a strong foundation for its application in leadership research. The most basic (and still important) leader-member exchange exists between God and man. When God created man, He initiated the relationship and provided the first resources in the exchange. God gave man dominion over the earth and all its creatures (Genesis 1:28-30), and in the beginning asked in exchange only that man tend to the garden and not eat from the tree of good and evil. It is established here that man has nothing to offer God in this LMX relationship. Instead, the relationship exists in the sense that God provides, and man maintains the path set forth. After the fall of man, there was a shift in the exchange and the expectations of what individuals will provide to that relationship. God provides each individual with the opportunity for eternal life (Romans 6:23) and forgiveness (John 3:16), and in return, it can be argued that nothing is expected. However, LMX can still exist through what man is expected to contribute through the exchange, which is not anything.

God lays out, quite plainly in some instances, what is expected of man, both through examples of relationships in the Bible and in the guidance provided. Exodus 20:2-17 (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016) defines at least 10 commandments that man

must abide by. These commandments, while again not explicitly for the benefit of God, require some basic level of effort and create a path for man to fulfill their end of the exchange. Much like rules in an organization, a baseline must be established for a relationship to exist. This creates the hierarchy and recognizes the proper means of participating in social exchanges. Without it, a lack of order would lead to the chaos seen between Cain and Abel, in Sodom and Gomorrah, or the flood. Similarly, in an organization, relationships will form around what is socially acceptable or considered the norm of that organization's culture. Pilch and Turska (2015) recognized that workplace bullying was more common among those with Machiavellian personalities, especially in organizational environments that were seen as unpredictable and chaotic. Organization-employee relationship quality is also stronger when the employee perceives a sense of organizational and supervisory justice. When order is established, relationships can prosper. Looking further at the member's side of the exchange in the biblical relationship between God and man, the injection of sin into the world also carries meaning. The ability of man to miss the mark, or sin, demonstrates that there is an ideal, encapsulated in the life of Jesus. While it is recognized that no one will ever be perfect in the same manner, it does mean that there are certain things that can be done right, or at least better. Again, this points to the effort that man brings into the exchange. Where the distinction lies is in the response to effort. In an organizational context, those with higher LMX will generally apply more effort, as discussed in increased performance (Breevaart et al., 2015). The Bible clearly states that God loves all, which is taken today as a blanket statement for all those who ask for forgiveness. But in examining the Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, some examples of LMX, and even LMXD can be seen.

The story of Moses paints a picture of LMX in the development and execution of the exchange, in which Moses is asked to act and trust in God's plan. Like LMX theory, the relationship itself and resources utilized are a central theme. In the book of Exodus, Moses (the member) is tasked by God (the leader) to free the Israelites from Egypt. God guides Moses, telling him what to say and do (resources needed to be successful), and in return Moses was to effectively act as the middle manager in the fulfillment of God's plan. This required a great deal of effort and faith from Moses (the resources exchanged in return), and in doing so created the reciprocal nature of LMX. Once freed, the Israelites looked to Moses as their leader, who subsequently relied on the leadership of God. The transference of resources from top leadership down is seen in Exodus 17, where God provides water from a rock. Interestingly, this raises the primary concern of this study, as Moses battles with the balance and management of his opposing directional relationships. God is providing direction and Moses prioritizes his relationship with God, while he tries to appease the people who are becoming agitated with their fate. Middle managers must live in this space where they balance the relationship and resources allocated from the top down to those they oversee. Removed from the spiritual context, the question of with whom and how one prioritizes these relationships becomes much more complex.

While many of the relationships described in the Bible appear like Moses', there is some evidence of LMXD between God and people as well. Most clearly laid out in Genesis 6:8-9 (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016) regarding Noah and his bloodline, the Bible states that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord…Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God." While it is clear that God

loves all His creation equally, the "favor" and subsequent flood is a biblical

representation of how LMXD can operate. It should not necessarily be viewed as

favoritism, but in the context of LMX, it is one individual within the group being given

an opportunity from a leader that others may not get. This is foundation of LMXD, that

some *exchanges* may be perceived as disparate from others.

**Summary**

There is ample opportunity to expand the working knowledge of leadership and

Scripture when utilizing LMX theory as the foundation of understanding. When

discussing leadership in either context, there tends to be a focus on the individual

contributions. In the case of leadership theory in general, the vast majority of historical

research examines the transformational and transactional behaviors of the singular leader

(Bauer, & Erdogan, 2016). Similarly, when studying the Bible, it is easy to become

fixated on the works of God or the individual people at the center of pivotal moments in

Scripture. In reality, a larger emphasis should be placed on the relationship that exists

between these entities. A transformational leader will not share an identical relationship

with every subordinate that they manage, just like each individual will read and interpret

the Scripture, pray, and maintain a unique relationship between themselves and God.

Chen et al. (2018) raises the question, is it really wrong to treat followers differently?

This is, however, a bit misleading and dependent upon how LMX (and particularly

LMXD) is framed. The LMXD is not inherently about treating anyone inequitably, it is

highlighting the fact that in a world where everyone is different and there is resource

scarcity, no two relationships can be exactly equitable. This holds especially true for

middle managers, where the dynamics between the relationships they hold can be

dramatically different depending on which direction they are looking.

The LMX has been extended beyond the single vertical dyad it began as in the 1970s and is now being explored at the group level (how the individual relates to a group). The next logical step in increasing the applicability of the theory is to look at how the individual interacts with multiple groups. This not only creates a bridge with which current knowledge can be leveraged in forming a basic understanding, but also allows for LMX to be applied more accurately to a real-world organization in which leader-member relationships do not act out in a vacuum. Leaders must succumb (to some extent) to their own needs and limitations, in the resources they themselves can access, and how they will ultimately allocate them. The middle manager becomes the perfect perspective from which LMX across levels can be examined. The nature of their role, and how they as individuals identify within it, creates the opportunity to investigate the correlation between the directional variability in LMX relationships, as well as how being at the center of these competing interests will correlate to their own job satisfaction as both a leader and a member of the overall organization.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

**Overview**

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology used in this research, as well as the rationale behind it. This includes a review of the research questions and hypotheses, before describing the type of research, the participant pool, and the instruments used. Given the applicability of LMX and the variety in which middle managers (both capacity and job sector) operate, the intention of this study was to cover a broad range of job sectors and a relatively open inclusion of those who work in the *middle* of the organizational hierarchy. The purpose of this study was to examine how LMX, LLX, and their interaction predict middle manager's job satisfaction, while also investigating the prevalence of incongruence LMX and LLX in middle manager ratings, and how that multi-level LMXD influences job satisfaction.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Does the quality of the leader-member relationship as measured by LMX score significantly predict job satisfaction in middle managers?

RQ 2: Does the quality of the leader-direct supervisor relationship as measured by LLX score significantly predict job satisfaction in middle managers above and beyond LMX score?

RQ 3: Does the relationship between LLX and job satisfaction depend on respondents' levels of LMX, and vice versa?

RQ 4: What is the prevalence of middle managers who report antagonistic LMX-LLX relationships (i.e., high LMX and low LLX, or low LMX and high

LLX)?

RQ 5: Does the differentiation between LMX and LLX, as measured by the

difference in composite LMX-LLX scores, predict job satisfaction in

middle managers?

**Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: Middle managers' LMX scores in relation to the leader-member

relationship will be a statistically and practically significant

predictor of middle manager job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Middle managers' LLX scores in relation to the leader-direct

supervisor relationship will statistically and practically

significantly predict middle manager job satisfaction above and

beyond LMX scores.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between LLX and job satisfaction does not

depend on LMX.

Hypothesis 4: A minority of middle managers will report high LMX quality in

one direction and low LMX quality in the other.

Hypothesis 5: Smaller LMX multi-level differentiation (i.e., the difference

between the LMX and LLX scores) will predict middle manager

job satisfaction.

## Research Design

This study was conducted using a primarily quantitative regression design and

analysis. Regression analyses are specifically used for determining the ability for one or

multiple variables to predict another variable within a sample, or across samples, both of

which are desired outcomes in this study. Correlational analysis and one-way ANOVA analysis were also used in an effort to investigate research questions four and five. The purpose of this study was to examine how LMX—in different directions—predicts the job satisfaction of a middle manager. In other words, this study seeks to investigate the strength of LMX between middle managers and subordinates and its ability to predict satisfaction, and LLX with middle managers and their direct supervisor and its ability to predict satisfaction above and beyond LMX. In both cases, and comparatively, looking at the predictive relationship between the variables will provide the best overall picture of the relatedness and predictability of the measures. The desired outcome of the study was not to demonstrate the how or why LMX in one direction over the other is more strongly predictive of satisfaction, but to establish a baseline of how a multi-level LMX framework may exist. The resulting data will provide a number of useful associations that can be made between organizational relationships and middle manager perceptions and work attitudes.

An important note is that this study was not meant to demonstrate any causation regarding LMX (singularly, or its interconnectedness across levels), satisfaction, or even leader identity. The purpose was to examine the variables at a particular moment in time and measure their relationship. The dynamic nature of LMX makes it highly subject to changing within an individual, and between individuals over time. This may become especially true as more and more exchanges are being considered.

## Participants

The primary subjects of this study were individuals who hold a middle management or frontline management position in the southeastern United States.

Historically, research that measured LMX did so either from the member perspective, or both the member and leader perspective. While the scores between the leaders and members are generally congruent (both scores being either high or low; Cogliser et al., 2009), the congruence between individuals was not a priority in this study. The focus was the internal perception of the middle managers' relationships across levels (within participant congruence and differentiation), ultimately requiring only the participation of a single individual to attain the pertinent data.

In order to increase applicability across organizations, different job types and populations were recruited, including both white and blue collar private sector managers. Combined, the information collected from these different job types allowed for a more holistic view of LMX and satisfaction for middle managers, as well as data to compare across function. This comparison is of particular note, given that research has not explicitly examined the differences across job types. Chang et al. (2020) hypothesized that more stressful working environments required the expenditure of more resources to prevent negative outcomes like exhaustion and burnout. These more volatile environments would theoretically be more reactionary to LMX, since high quality LMX can provide crucial resources.

While Chang et al. (2020) were unable to support this hypothesis in their meta-analysis, it does align with the conservation of resources theory, in that the use of resources may be required to prevent future resource loss (e.g., investing extra time in developing an algorithm to automate a future work process). The issue with this hypothesis is that stress can be highly individualized, and may be dramatically different dependent upon job type/role even within the same sector. The lack of support for this

hypothesis can also be identified in an earlier meta-analysis, where Dulebohn et al.

(2012) found no evidence that LMX and its antecedents were impacted by work setting.

With that in mind, it was expected that the various settings included here should garner

similar results, though the lack of studies looking across job types still warrants inclusion.

This study examined job sectors from a more basic perspective, differentiating based on

work environments without delving into actual field of expertise within that realm.

In order to determine sample size, an *a priori* power analysis was conducted. This

study is a predictive relational study and looked at previous correlation coefficients to

determine a general strength of the relationship between LMX and job satisfaction.

Previous studies such as Fisk and Friesen (2012), Han and Jekel (2011), and Hooper and

Martin (2008) all found a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .49$-

.55). Even in a logitudinal study, Volmer et al. (2011) found the two variables to be

strongly related across time. Finally, since much of the modern workforce is performing

their roles remotely, it is important to consider the impact of teleworking on this

relationship. When looking specifically at virtual organizations, Golden and Veiga (2008)

found that the correlation is similar in strength in these environments ($r = .48$).

Based on these previous studies, an *a priori* power analysis was used to determine

appropriate sample size, using G*Power exact correleation bivariate normal model two-

tailed *a priori* test with a slightly above moderate effect size of .35. This effect size was

used based on the typically large effect size found in studies of LMX and reduced to

account for the relatively unknown effect size specifically of the leader rated LMX on

outcomes and attitudes (if the correlatonal strength is .50, it is considered a large effect

size; Martin & Bridgmon, 2012). The analysis used a power of .80, and an alpha of .05.

The results indicated a total sample size of 61 was required to meet adequate power. Baruch and Holtom (2008) found that the average individual response rate for surveys conducted in organizations was 52.7% with a standard deviation of 20.4, making the lower end of the response rate typically around 32.3%. Similary, the survey site QuestionPro (n.d.) found email surveys generate a 25%-35% response rate. Using the conservative assumption that approximately 25%-32% of those contacted will respond, at least 191 to 244 individuals would need to be recruited for participation.

**White Collar Private Sector**

For this study, the white collar and blue collar managers both worked for the same parent organization, allowing for the recruitment of participants to go through the same contact. The human resources department of the organization was contacted to request permission to reach out via email to individuals who meet the aforementioned criteria. White collar employees in this context consisted of individuals with "Lead," "Supervisor," "Manager," or "Director" in their job title. The participants were also required to manage or supervise at least one employee, excluding all individuals who manage processes or systems exclusively. The manufacturing organization is located in the southeastern United States, and this subset of managers work primarily in corporate offices. The job type of the individuals in this sector varied dependent upon the department, as did the size of the teams they manage. This can include sales managers leading teams of 20-30 employees, or specific planning managers with teams of 2-3. The current structure of the organization has led to a maximum ratio of approximately 30 employees to one manager in larger departments (e.g., sales, production and merchandise, IT). More specialized departments (sourcing, sustainability, planning) maintain a much

smaller ratio, which in some cases can even be 1:1. Changes due to COVID-19 led to a vast majority of employees working remotely, though the organization encouraged employees to remain in the local area of corporate offices. Once permission was received from the human resources contact, all eligible participants were emailed with a brief introduction and description of the purpose of the study, an informed consent document (see Appendix C), and a link to the survey. The recruitment information, including a request for permission to reach out to participants, and the initial contact email that was sent to the participants is included in Appendix A.

**Blue Collar Private Sector**

The same organization also operates a number of manufacturing and distribution warehouses in the United States. The initial request to the organization included both corporate and warehouse managers. In the warehouses, individuals who work as either warehouse operations managers, or act as supervisors or leads, were solicited for participation. The overall participation pool was not as large as the white collar subset. Participants here were expected to be slightly less educated, as most positions require previous experience in warehouses compared to the educational requirements of the typcial corporate roles.

<div align="center">

**Study Procedures**

</div>

The private sector organization used to solicit participants for this study had approximately 300-350 employees that meet inclusion criteria. Authorization to work with the employees came from the appropriate human resource contact. Informed consent came in the form of the first question of the survey, where it confirmed the participants read the risks, confidentiality, investigator statement, and withdrawal statement and

indicated consent by the selection of either the "Yes" or "No" option. The survey was available to the participants for 14 days. The survey results came directly to the researcher through the survey site, SurveyMonkey.

The surey was identical for each participant, and all employees who qualified to be included in the study received a recruitment email. The email contained the recruitment message (see Appendix A) and a link to the survey. The email was sent via the approving contact within the organization. No personal identifiable information was required or collected, in order to maintain anonymity. Informed consent was attained at the very beginning of the survey. By selecting "Yes" the participants advanced to the next question of the survey, and upon selecting "No" participants were asked to close out the survey. The survey began with a request for information regarding: Private Corporate, Private Manufacturing, or Public sector work, gender, ethnicity, eductaion level, and tenure in current role (see Appendix D).

The participants received the following assessments in the order provided: demographic information, LMX-7, SLMX-7, and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire – Short Form (MSQ-SF) (Vocational Psychology Research, 1997). No additional personal information (e.g., name, specific job title, location) was requested. In order to maintain organized data, participants were coded into generic numbers, mitigating the need for personal identity data. The collected data was stored in an encrypted file that is password protected. The data was only made accessible to the researcher and doctoral committee. All data will be stored for three years per federal regulations, at which point it will be permanantly deleted.

## Instrumentation and Measurement

### LMX-7

The Leader-member exchange 7-item (LMX-7; see Appendix E) assessment created by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) continues to be the dominant assessment used in LMX research. The LMX-7 has been shown to be very reliable and has purported to have good construct validity (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Some critics of the LMX-7 note the unidimensional perspective the LMX-7 uses, especially in comparison with the multidimensional LMX-MDM (Liden & Masalyn, 1998). Where the two differentiate themselves is in in length, consistency, and effect. The LMX-7 is limited to 7 items, compared to the LMX-MDM's 12. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) additionally argue that the dimensions of LMX are so highly correlated they can effectively be measured through the unidemnsional approach, and this unidemnsional score is much more consistent over time than the individual dimensions. In their study of the tourism industry, Chang et al. (2020) found that the LMX-7 (with a 5-point Likert scale) had much stronger correlations to the measured outcomes.

Despite being one of the most widely used assessments of LMX, the validity of the LMX-7 is still debated. This is likely a result of the piecemeal fashion in which it came to exist, developing and evolving over time, as compared to the stringent psychometric testing the LMX-MDM used (Bauer & Erdogan, 2016). In their meta-analysis, Dulebohn et al. (2012) found the two assessments correlated highly in their global LMX measures, and demonstrated consistently when relating to both antecedents and outcomes. Even with the different perspectives, the results of the two different assessments are strongly correlated ($r = .9$; Joseph et al., 2011).

**SLMX-7**

The Supervisor Leader-member exchange 7-item (SLMX-7) assessment was

created simultaneously with the LMX-7 and mirrors the same questions, asking from the

leader perspective. While again, the validity of the SLMX-7 may be considered

uncertain, the correlation between this measure and measures of associated factors is

strong enough to warrant its continued use. There have been reports that the congruence

between leader and member LMX scores is lower than expected, and alternative

measures have been adapted to mitigate this issue (Schriesheim et al., 2011). These

alternative versions do not have the same research backing and prolonged validity as the

original LMX-7 and SLMX-7. Another advantage to using the original SLMX-7 is the

notion that the only perspective of value in this study was that of the middle manager.

This mitigates the need for congruence between the leader and member, since the

correlation between the managers' perception and their own attitudes was the focus.

**Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction was measured using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire –

Short Form (MSQ-SF) (Vocational Psychology Research, 1977). This 20-item scale is a

shorted version of the MSQ-Long Form, originally developed in 1963 and later modified

slightly in 1977. The MSQ was designed to measure 20 facets of job satisfaction,

including such facets as acheivement, authority, responsibility, recognition, and social

status. Specifically, the MSQ-SF utilizes one question for each facet. All 20 items are

scored on the same 5-point Likert scale (1- Very Dissatisfied to 5- Very Satisfied). The

questions are divided into extrinsic and intrinsic items, and all 20 items can be combined

to create an overall general satisfaction score. The shorter version has been found to have

high reliability coefficients for all three areas of satisfaction it measures: general (.90), intrinisic (.86), and extrinsic (.80). For the purposes of this study, the general satisfaction score will be the primary focus. This test has also been found to have good construct validity in its comparison to other satisfaction-based measures both at the time of its inception (Weiss et al., 1967), and more recently have continued to prove valid (Brown et al. 2006; Lakatamitou et al., 2020).

## Operationalization of Variables

**Global Leader-member Exchange (with subordinates)** – This variable is an interval variable and will be measured by total score on the SLMX-7 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

**Global Leader-leader Exchange (with direct supervisor)** – This variable is an interval variable and will be measured by total score on the LMX-7 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

**Job Satisfaction** – Job satisfaction is an interval variable that will be measured via the MSQ-SF, with the composite score representing global job satisfaction.

## Data Analysis

As a way to quickly examine the more nuanced relationships that can be found as a biproduct of the assessments used, and to foreshadow the answers to the research questions, an exploratory correlational analysis was used first. For instance, the MSQ-SF allows for the breakdown of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction, which could be compared individually to the the LMX and LLX scores. These correlation coefficicients will help to understand how these variables are associated with one another. This analysis will also provide an excellent view of how upward relationship scores are associated with downward relationship scores.

A regression analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS). This allowed for the inclusion of multiple independent variables (LMX,

LLX, and multi-level LMXD) and the ability to determine how much variance in the

dependent variable was explained by each. Figure 2 depicts the proposed interrelationship

of the variables and how the two exchange directions converge as unique components

that contribute to the middle manager's satisfaction. This figure also provides a visual

breakdown of where each hypothesis fits into the theorized structure. A regression

analysis will also allow for the exploration of the impact that the interaction of LMX and

LLX has on job satisfaction. For instance, is there a stronger relationship between LMX

and job satisfaction for middle managers with a high score in LLX as compared to those

with low scores?

**Figure 2**

*Hypotheses and Depiction of Variable Connections*
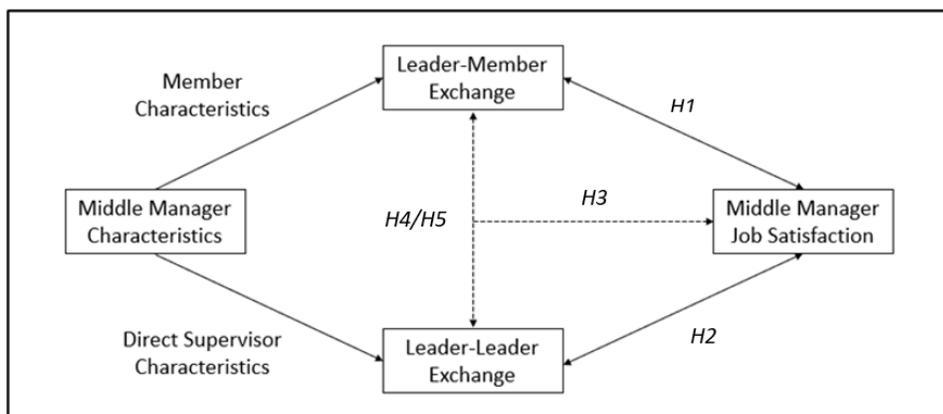


**Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**

The main assumption made in this study is the equivalency of all middle manger

roles. Dependent upon the position, depeartment, job type, team size, and so on,

individuals may feel more or less empowered independent of their actual role. By virtue

of organizational structure and design, some positons may inherently have more

autonomy in decision making or a smaller top to bottom management chain. The assumption made here was that all mid-level managers represent some aspect of the *middle* in regards to their leadership position. Managers who may more stongly identitfy as a leader may be indicative of actual organizational/structural power, and this was taken into consideration. For the sake of this study, it was assumed that any individual with subordinates and a direct supervisor is still a component of the middle management level.

A second assumption was that individuals responded to the assessments honestly. In this study, managers were asked to rate the relationship with both their own supervisor and manager. Cogliser et al. (2009) found high levels of congruence between leader and member LMX ratings, which would indicate that individuals are generally capable of accurately rating the quality of their relationships, and that managers will not necessarily over-rate the score to improve their own leadership qualities. The difference in this study was that only the manager perception was being measured. This means there are no counter perspectives to either confirm or refute the scores of the participant, opening up the possibility of managers unwilling to accurately report poor relationships with their subordinates going unchecked.

A limitation in this study was the inability of a correlational analysis to provide any results relating to causation, or to fill the gap of LMX/LLX development. A correlational study only provides an association between the variables, and this study will not be able to make any assertions regarding whether strong LLX leads to higher LMX. It can still be theorized along the lines of the COR theory that high LLX means more access to resources, which in turn are passed down, thus improving LMX; however, this cannot be demonstrated just through these results. Similarly, a current research gap in LMX

exists around the development or process behind LMX. The nuances involved in LMX quality growing or deteriorating over time wouold require a longitudinal, and most likely a qualitative or mixed methods design.

## Summary

The LMX-7 continues to be one of the most widely used measures of LMX in research. While it was not created using the same stringent empirical evidence of the LMX-MDM, its convergent validity of global LMX scoring makes it a concise and effective means of measuring LMX. This study was looking to leverage the unique role of the middle manager to expand the current application of the LMX-7 and SLMX-7, and leverage both assessments from the perspective of the same individual. Organizational structures are often complex webs of relationships that operate vertically and lateraly, yet to this point, only a single contained dyad has been used as the foundation of this leadership theory. This is perhaps why LMX has failed to break from the academic world and become a theory more commonly used in analyzing real-world organizational leadership. The LMX has the capabiltiy of being used in explaining how competing interests and multiple relationships influence the behaviors and attitudes of individuals throughout the hiearchy, but thus far examining leadership through a narrow lens has limited the transferrability of LMX across levels.

This study looked to analyze how LMX and LLX come together and influence the job satisfaction of middle managers in various job settings and roles. In each new iteration of LMX's theoretical foundations have been slightly altered, deemphasizing crucial components of leader relations such as role theory and accessibility to resources. As LMX continues to evolve, it will expand again from between-subject, to group, to

now multi-level analysis of how mid-level leaders are molded by their positions and focus on bi-directional relationships in the workplace.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

**Overview**

The purpose of this research was to expand on the current literature and application of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. This theory of leadership focuses on the unique interpersonal relationship that forms between a leader and a follower, typically based on trust, loyalty, mutual respect, and affect. Only by applying this theory to those in a middle management position could new insights on the importance and development of leader-follower relationships in organizations be found. This study aimed to fill an existing gap in literature surrounding how LMX impacts leader outcomes, as well as how mid-level leaders are influenced by the requirement of holding both upward and downward relationships.

Through an examination of the results, five primary research questions can be explored. These research questions ask if (1) the quality of leader-member relationship as measured by LMX score significantly predicts job satisfaction in middle managers; (2) if the quality of leader-direct supervisor relationship as measured by LLX score significantly predicts job satisfaction in middle managers above and beyond this LMX score; and, (3) if the relationship between LMX and job satisfaction depends on a respondent's level of LLX, and vice versa. The study was also guided by attempting to (4) identify the prevalence of middle managers who report antagonistic LMX-LLX relationships. And finally, (5) exploring if the differentiation between LMX and LLX, as measured by the difference in composite LMX-LLX scores, can predict job satisfaction in middle managers.

Data for this study was collected through an anonymous online survey targeting

mid-level management in private sector employees. The surveys assessed the single middle manager's perception of the quality of their relationship with their direct supervisor and their longest supervised employee, while also assessing their self-reported job satisfaction.

## Descriptive Results

After 14 days, 73 of the 307 individuals who were initially sent a recruitment email (see Appendix A) responded to the survey. Of those 73 responses, 6 were incomplete and were thus removed, leaving 67 total participants used in the final analysis. The majority of participants held professional roles (73.1%), and most of the participants were of White or Caucasian ethnicity (85.1%). The sample was roughly evenly split on gender, with 50.7% of the participants being male. Many of the participants held a college degree, and the vast majority had been in their role for under 5 years (see Table 1).

## Study Findings

### Preliminary Correlational Analysis

Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations of all collected variables, as well as correlational data. The correlations indicate the strength of the relationship among the demographic variables and the variables of interest to the study, and also foreshadow the regression analysis. The results of this preliminary correlational analysis showed that there were no significant correlations between any of the demographic variables and LMX, LLX, or job satisfaction. The correlational analysis also showed a moderately-sized positive correlation between LMX and LLX, indicating that the two variables were related in this sample. There was a very strong positive correlation between MSQ-SF (job

satisfaction) and LLX ($r$ = 0.708), suggesting that LLX will likely be a strong predictor of job satisfaction in the regression analyses. Additionally, Appendix H shows the correlation between LMX, LLX, and LMXD with all of the various facets of job satisfaction as measured by the MSQ-SF. Of the 20 facets, 17 were significantly correlated to LLX, while none were significantly correlated to LMX, further highlighting the relationship that job satisfaction has with LLX.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demographics | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | 1.52 | .560 | - | | | | | | | |
| Ethnicity | 1.27 | .709 | -.206 | - | | | | | | |
| Education | 3.75 | .893 | -.034 | .037 | - | | | | | |
| Job Type | 1.27 | .447 | .097 | -.136 | -.206 | - | | | | |
| Tenure | 1.96 | .960 | .072 | -.182 | -.172 | .134 | - | | | |
| Leader-Member | | | | | | | | | | |
| LLX | 26.81 | 5.71 | .065 | .050 | -.119 | -.050 | -.161 | - | | |
| LMX | 30.82 | 2.69 | .142 | .002 | -.157 | .003 | .131 | .295* | - | |
| LMX-D | 4.94 | 4.78 | .091 | -.062 | .074 | .142 | .224 | -.842** | .102 | - |
| Job Satisfaction | | | | | | | | | | |
| MSQ-SF | 77.07 | 11.57 | .118 | .134 | -.107 | -.013 | -.227 | .708** | .073 | -.622** |

*Note.* N = 67. Gender is scored as male = 1, female = 2, and did not disclose = 3. Data for ethnicity is scored White or Caucasian = 1, Hispanic or Latino = 2, Black or African American = 3, and Asian American or Pacific Islander = 4. Data for education was scored high school or equivalent = 1, some college = 2, associate degree = 3, bachelor's degree = 4, and graduate degree = 5. Data for job type was scored professional role = 1, operations role = 2. Data for tenure was scored 0-2 years = 1, 3-5 years = 2, 6-10 years = 3, 11-20 years = 4, and 21+ years = 5.
*$p$ <.05
**$p$ < .01

**Research Questions 1, 2, and 3**

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine if LMX and LLX could act as predictors of middle manager job satisfaction (based on the MSQ-SF assessment).

The participants were asked to assess the quality of their relationship with both their longest managed/supervised subordinate (operationalized by the LMX score) and their direct supervisor (operationalized by the LLX score). The first research question looked at the ability of LMX (i.e., the relationship quality between a middle manager and their most tenured subordinate) to predict job satisfaction. The hypothesis, that LMX would predict middle manager job satisfaction, was not supported ($F(1,65) = .351$, $p = .556$, $R^2 = .005$; $b = .313$). The second research question included LLX, and the subsequent hypothesis suggested that LLX would predict middle manager satisfaction above and beyond LMX. In the second step of the regression analysis (see Table 2), LLX was included in the model along with LMX. The results indicated that LLX was a statistically significant predictor of job satisfaction above and beyond LMX ($F(2,64) = 34.757$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .521$; LLX $b = 1.511$). Notably, 51.6% of the variance in the outcome was explained solely by LLX. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

The third research question sought to analyze the impact of the interaction between LMX and LLX on job satisfaction. Prior to conducting the multiple regression analysis on this interaction, both LLX and LMX were centered by subtracting the mean from every score. As seen in Table 2, the overall model using the interaction term was statistically significant ($F(3,63) = 22.814$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .521$). However, the statistical significance was driven primarily by LLX, as the results showed that the interaction term itself was not statistically or practically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .000$, $b = -.005$, $p = .936$). Between the three models, the R-Squared changed .515 from Model 1 to Model 2, and .000 from Model 2 to Model 3. This change suggests the inclusion of LLX into the model has a large, significant impact, while the subsequent inclusion of the interaction has a

negligible contribution to the overall model. These results indicate that the level of LMX does not impact the relationship between LLX and job satisfaction, and vice versa.

**Table 2**

*Regression Predicting Job Satisfaction from LMX, LLX, and their Interaction*

| Step and Predictor Variable | $R^2$ | $sr^2$ | $b$ | 95% CI of $b$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | .005 | | | |
| LMX | | - | .313 | -.741 to 1.366 |
| Step 2 | .521* | | | |
| LMX | | .020 | -.632 | -1.404 to .140 |
| LLX | | .516 | 1.511* | 1.147 to 1.875 |
| Step 3 | .521* | | | |
| LMX | | .020 | -.635 | -1.417 to .147 |
| LLX | | .507 | 1.513* | 1.143 to 1.883 |
| Interaction | | .000 | -.005 | -.129 to .119 |

*Note*. *$p < .05$

Figure 3 visually depicts this interaction between LLX and LMX on middle manager job satisfaction. Three levels of LMX were plotted: the mean of LMX (26.81), one standard deviation above the mean of LMX (32.52), and one standard deviation below the mean of LMX (21.1). Since LLX was centered, the value of zero on the x-axis represents the mean LLX score of 30.82. In this figure, the lines are relatively parallel. This means that as LLX scores increase, job satisfaction scores increase at roughly the same rate at all levels of LMX score. There is an intersection between the mean and +1 standard deviation score lines in Figure 1, which would suggest the possibility of a slight interaction; however, this occurs at a score of 40.82, which is beyond the maximum scoring for the assessments used.

**Figure 3**

*Regression of Job Satisfaction on LLX Scores at Three Levels of LMX Scores*
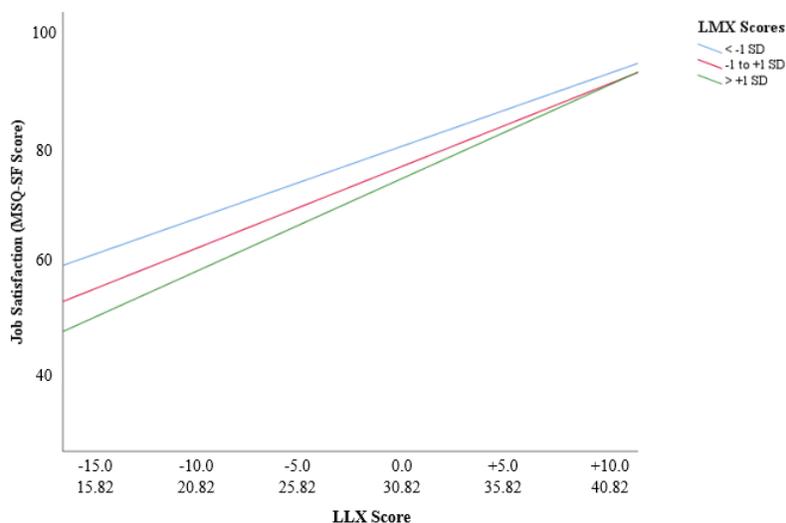


**Research Question 4**

This research question explored the existence of LMXD clusters, or middle managers who have incongruent relationships across levels. In order to determine the prevalence of these groupings, LMX and LLX were categorized into very high (30-35), high (25-29), moderate (20-24), low (15-19), and very low (7-14), based on the scoring criteria from Hanasono's (2017) LMX-7 profile. The participants were then put into clusters based on their results (e.g., very low LMX – very low LLX, very low LMX – low LLX, very low LMX – moderate LLX, etc.; see Table 3). Hypothesis 4 suggested the majority of middle managers would categorize both relationships similarly, showing bi-directional congruence in relationship quality. The breakdown of these clusters supports Hypothesis 4 in that the overwhelming majority of participants' LMX and LLX were in the same or adjacent categories. It is of note that all LMX ratings (middle manager and their subordinate) were only high or very high, while the leader-leader relationships

spanned across all ratings. When looking at those that did not align, in all but three cases, the LMX score was rated as higher or the same as the LLX scores. For those three participants, the LLX score was very high and the LMX score was high.

**Table 3**

*Number of Participants in Each LMX-LLX Cluster (N = 67)*

| Cluster | Very Low LLX | Low LLX | Moderate LLX | High LLX | Very High LLX |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High LMX | 1 | 3 | 5 | 12 | 3 |
| Very High LMX | | 7 | 2 | 15 | 19 |

**Research Question 5**

The final research question looked to extend LMXD further, and it was hypothesized that smaller LMXD (the difference between the composite LLX and LMX scores) would be positively correlated with middle manager job satisfaction. Before conducting the analysis, the LMXD was calculated by subtracting LMX from LLX and then using the absolute value of that number as the difference. This number was then used as the independent variable in the analysis, and the job satisfaction score (MSQ-SF score) was used as the dependent variable. A correlational analysis was conducted, and the results suggested that the smaller the difference (i.e., the more similar the two scores were), the higher the job satisfaction (i.e., MSQ-SF) score was ($r = -.622$, $p < .001$). This suggests that when LMX and LLX scores are similar, the job satisfaction score is higher.

To further investigate the potential impact that multi-level LMXD has on middle manager job satisfaction, an ANOVA analysis was used. The participants were categorized into three groups: (1) higher LLX score than LMX score, (2) same LLX and LMX score, and (3) lower LLX score than LMX score. The results of an ANOVA

analysis showed there was a significant difference in means across the three groups,

$F(2,64) = 19.789$, $p < .001$. The descriptive statistics for the three groups can be seen in

Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Multi-level LMXD Descriptive Statistics*

| Group | N | Mean Job Satisfaction Score | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Higher LLX than LMX | 13 | 86.38 | 5.87 |
| Identical LLX and LMX | 9 | 88.44 | 7.17 |
| Lower LLX than LMX | 45 | 72.11 | 10.24 |

In order to determine which groups had statistically significantly different means,

a Tukey HSD post hoc statistical test was conducted. The results indicated there was a

statistically significant difference between the means of the "Higher LLX than LMX" and

"Identical LLX and LMX" groups versus the "Lower LLX than LMX" group (M =

72.11; mean differences of 14.27 and 16.33, $p < .001$, respectively).

Finally, a post hoc power analysis was conducted using the G*Power tool (see

Appendix B). Using the large effect size found in this study, the post hoc power analysis

showed a power of .99, which was higher than the a priori desired power of .80.

**Summary**

The results of this study present new data that can be used to better understand

how multi-directional relationships that middle managers have influence one another.

Further, using this information, it can be better understood what relationships truly

predict a middle manager's job satisfaction, and how measuring a manager's relationship

with a subordinate may only act as superfluous data points in determining their job

satisfaction. The results show that LLX (the relationship between the middle manager and their direct supervisor) is a strong predictor of job satisfaction, while LMX (the relationship between the middle manager and their subordinate) is not. The regression analysis also found the inclusion of the interaction term of LLX and LMX did not contribute any additional variance to the model of predicting job satisfaction.

It was also found that while most middle managers rated their relationships with their subordinate as higher in quality than with their supervisor, there were few participants who reported the opposite, supporting the hypothesis that both antagonistic clusters would exist. Finally, it was found that there is LMXD across organizational levels can also be used to predict job satisfaction. In the next chapter, these results and theories that can be derived from them in the larger context of the existing LMX literature will be examined.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

**Overview**

The purpose of this study was to examine how the quality of a middle manager's relationships with their direct supervisor and with their subordinate predicts middle manager job satisfaction. The study also sought to explore how these two variables interact, and how the differentiation between the two relationships related to middle manager job satisfaction. This chapter will review and discuss the findings of the study, explore the theoretical and practical implications, discuss key limitations, and identify future research that can help expand upon these results.

**Summary of Findings**

This study attempted to shed light on a little-studied aspect of the middle manager experience by assessing how a middle manager views the vertical dyadic chain in which they operate. In doing so, the data showed the vast majority of middle managers perceive their relationship with their subordinate to be more positive in quality than the relationship they have with their own direct supervisor. Despite the difference in quality, the study found the upward relationship between a middle manager and their supervisor is a strong predictor of middle manager job satisfaction, while the downward relationship with their subordinate is not. While this study was unique in framing and overall scope, these results do align with previous findings and meta-analyses that suggest LMX is a predictor of job satisfaction for the subordinate, but not the supervisor (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

The study also found that antagonistic pairings of LMX across levels existed amongst middle managers. While multi-level LMXD (i.e., the absolute difference

between the LMX and LLX scores) was also significantly related to job satisfaction in middle managers, these findings can be a bit misleading. While the highest job satisfaction scores were found amongst the middle managers who rated the two relationships the same, there is a dramatic decrease in job satisfaction scores when looking at those with lower LLX scores than LMX scores, compared to the only slight drop in satisfaction scores for those with higher LLX scores than LMX. This would imply that while any differentiation does have an impact on job satisfaction, it is still heavily skewed by the LLX score (i.e., the quality of the relationship with the supervisor). Still, the data does provide evidence that middle managers' relationships across levels are not always congruent.

## Discussion of Findings

### Differences in Rating on LLX and LMX

Most middle managers in this study believe they have better relationships with their subordinates than they have with their manager. Not only was the mean leader-subordinate relationship score higher than the leader-direct supervisor relationship score (30.82 compared to 26.81), but the standard deviation was also much smaller (2.69 compared to 5.71), indicating that middle managers were much more consistent across the board in reporting a strong relationship with their subordinate. Regardless of the relationship with their own supervisor, all middle managers felt they maintained a high-quality relationship with their subordinates. While this finding was not hypothesized, there are a number of reasons why these results could occur.

As previously discussed, Dulebohn et al. (2012) suggested that leaders hold more power in the leader-member relationship and control the relationship's growth and

development. Therefore, it is possible that middle managers can improve relationships

with their subordinates simply because they are in greater control over those

relationships. In many cases the leader in a LMX will control factors such as the

frequency of communication, which is related to LMX (Gajendran & Joshi, 2012). The

control over the relationship then allows the leader to not only dictate the development of

the relationship, but also places the burden of maximizing the benefits in the relationship

on the member, a concept that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

An alternative reason for the relationship scoring discrepancy may be the desire

for managers to highlight their own leadership ability. The anonymity of the survey

allows for honesty in its discretion, but simultaneously for a lack in accountability in that

the member will not have their own opportunity to assess the relationship. When filled

out by the leader, the LMX-7 can potentially be viewed as less of an objective rating of

the relationship and more of a self-indictment of a manager's leadership ability. A middle

manager may then rate their ability and the trust that their subordinate has in them higher

than actuality, simply because that is the more desirable response.

One final possibility is simply the bias of the Kruger-Dunning effect, or the

tendency for people to overestimate their own abilities (Pennycook et al., 2017). In this

case, middle managers may have simply overestimated the amount that their subordinates

trust, respect, and like them. When Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) looked at intra-

organizational trust, they described three types of trust: trust as a belief, decision, and

action. In the case of the LMX-7, trust is measured as a belief. Questions such as "Your

member has enough confidence in you that they would defend and justify your decision if

you were not present to do so" asks the middle manager to determine if they believe their

subordinate trusts them. However, if there is no previous experience in which this trust was demonstrated (i.e., any previous instances where a subordinate defended a manager's decision), the middle manager must make a subjective assessment of their ability to be a trustworthy leader. As Kruger and Dunning (1999) demonstrated, people may overestimate their skills, including their skills as a leader. This explanation would then suggest that the middle managers are not purposefully over-inflating the LMX scores but are simply unaware of what high trust and respect relationships may look like from the perspective of a leader. This unawareness of their own incompetence, as Kruger and Dunning (1991) put it, would similarly manifest itself when rating other social and leadership skills assessed by the LMX-7 items. If middle managers lack competence in areas such as respectful workplace relationships, recognizing subordinate potential, or understanding job problems, they may not be able to accurately assess these categories.

Overall, this difference between LLX and LMX in the study does support Hypothesis 4, which looks for the existence of antagonistic clusters in the data. Cogliser et al. (2009) found that most LMX dyads were rated congruently by the leader and member. This implies that leaders and members view their relationships in a similar light. This study sought to take the first steps in expanding that clustering to a multi-level perspective. While the majority of participants rated the two relationships congruently, there were a small contingent of middle managers who felt that one relationship was of better quality than the other.

**LLX and LMX as Related to Job Satisfaction**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the influence that competing interests of the leader and follower role has on an individual. The findings of this study

can be used as evidence that many middle managers are able to balance the needs of both

roles and develop high quality relationships in both directions (i.e., 49 of the 67

participants rated both relationships as high or very high). In one aspect, this study

supports the existing literature (e.g., Harris et al., 2009; Malik et al., 2015), showing a

strong correlation between LLX and job satisfaction ($r = .708$, $p < .01$). In the regression

analysis, 52.1% of the variance in job satisfaction was explained by LLX after controlling

for LMX. This finding supports the second hypothesis of this study identifying LLX (i.e.,

the relationship between a middle manager and their direct supervisor) as a good

predictor of middle manager job satisfaction. The difference between this study and

previous studies is largely semantical in this context, as the middle manager in this

relationship is simply the member, and the direct supervisor is the leader (i.e., LMX using

two individuals in leadership positions). While this study looked primarily at overall job

satisfaction, the individual facets of satisfaction that the MSQ-SF covers showed that

high-quality leader-member relationships were significantly correlated to 17 of the 20

facets.

Both Malik et al. (2015) and Ertürk and Albayrak (2020) found empowerment

was positively related to LMX. The empowering behaviors they focused on included

having greater responsibilities and involvement in decision-making. Looking at the

individual facets of satisfaction, the findings demonstrate that higher quality LLX is

positively correlated with social status (.488), independence (.243), responsibility (.513),

and creativity (.571). These facets can similarly be considered representations of these

same empowering behaviors (e.g., the MSQ-SF question "[I have] The freedom to use

my own judgement"). Empowerment through increased autonomy, responsibility, and

status within the organization is reflected in the results of this study. More empowering behaviors are associated with higher LLX, and subsequently higher LLX translates itself into more satisfaction.

Virtually no literature exists measuring the LMX relationship and outcomes from the perspective of the leader. This study hypothesized that the relationship quality with a direct supervisor would be a better predictor of job satisfaction, but the relationship with subordinates would still be able to predict middle manager job satisfaction. This hypothesis was largely based on the notion that there would be congruence between the upward and downward relationship, likely due to a lack in appropriate resources to not only be empowered as a middle manager but to then empower one's own subordinate.

A significant finding of this study is that the relationship between a leader and their member has very little influence on the leader's job satisfaction ($r = .073$, $R^2 = .005$). For many leaders and managers, this may be a surprising result, as many would contend that having a good relationship with their employees is very important to them. While this may be true and having a good relationship with employees would certainly have its benefits, the results of this study indicate that increased leader job satisfaction is not one of them. The question then becomes: Why does LMX have such a minimal influence on leader satisfaction?

Looking at the MSQ-SF (Weiss et al., 1967) questions and considering the notion that individuals ultimately want to increase their status in the organizational hierarchy, it can be determined that many of the questions are geared toward resources and outcomes that can only come from a middle manager's own leader. A subordinate does not have the power or influence within an organization to give their leader more authority,

responsibility, advancement opportunity, new tasks, and so on. All the facets measured

by the MSQ-SF are dictated by a leader. From the evolutionary psychology perspective,

it is expected that more emphasis will be placed in the relationships that have the

potential to deliver more resources and hierarchical mobility, hence the large correlation

between LLX and middle manager satisfaction. The results also show the middle

managers may be able to devote more time in cultivating the downward relationship

(likely due to the power discrepancy), but the valuable resources still come from higher

in the hierarchy. This leads to the seeming dismissal of any benefit of the LMX stemming

from the subordinate relationship when considering overall job satisfaction.

**Multi-level Differentiation**

Initially, the results of this study indicated that the differentiation between LLX

and LMX is strongly related to middle manager job satisfaction ($F(2,64) = 19.789$, $p <$

.001). However, these results may be a bit misleading when looking at the overall trends.

Instead of the antagonistic clusters being evenly dispersed, the majority of these

individuals fall into the cluster of higher LMX and lower LLX (see Table 3). It can be

surmised that the differentiation is closely linked to the LLX scores (again supported by

the very strong correlation between LLX and LMXD; $r = -.842$, $p < .01$). In other words,

since middle managers rated their LMX so highly, the differentiation is mostly found due

to the lower LLX scores. As the LLX scores drop (increasing the LMXD), job

satisfaction decreases. This is again supported by the ANOVA analysis indicating the

significant difference of means was only found when comparing the "Lower LLX than

LMX" group with the others.

Previous literature by Bernerth and Hirschfeld (2016) observed the negative

impact of intra-group LMXD (the difference between LMX scores of members under the same leader) on a leader's well-being. Similarly, LMXD in this study also impacted an outcome for the middle manager. Bernerth and Hirschfeld (2009) found that LMXD did account for variance in positive affect and job stress. It is possible that differentiation in this instance may also cause some level of distress that impacts job satisfaction.

One area this may be seen is when looking at how the LMXD scores correlate with the satisfaction facets of advancement and recognition ($r = -.626$ and $r = -.607$ respectively). This may be indicative of increased dissatisfaction that is more directly caused by the differentiation of the two relationships. If a middle manager feels they are demonstrating good leadership qualities through the development of high LMX, yet their LLX is low, the discrepancy in relationship quality may lead to increased feelings of not receiving adequate advancement opportunities or deserved recognition.

**Biblical Significance of the Findings**

Using the same framing established previously, the Biblical significance of this work surrounds the notion that individuals balance life between their relationship with God and their relationships with others. The Scripture simultaneously promotes a strong relationship with God and neighbor, such as in Luke 10:27: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016). An adherence to the Scripture would lead to the belief that the development of all relationships is equally important. Some teachings go as far as to suggest the interests of others are more important than one's own (e.g., "Count others more significant than yourselves" and "Look not only to [one's] own interests, but also to the interests of

others"; *English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, Philippians 2:3-4). These verses suggest that when our relationship with God is strong, we in turn emphasize the significance of our relationships with others. Similarly, this study recognizes the correlation between LMX and LLX, in that the two are positively related. There are still times where the interests of the individual in the middle, or the middle manager, are conflicted. This study would suggest that individuals are more primed to rely on the upward relationship as an influential force on their satisfaction. Extending this notion to the Biblical context, the assumption would be that one's relationship with God would ultimately hold more influence. Earlier, the example of Moses was used to describe how LMX may manifest itself in the Bible. A more extreme example can be seen when looking at the story of Abraham.

In Genesis 22 (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016), Abraham is approached by God and commanded to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Abraham must then choose which relationship he must prioritize. In many ways this decision is analogous to the more mundane version in regular office life. A top organizational leader that may or may not directly talk to the middle manager every day has asked the manager to perform a function that will dramatically strain their relationship with their subordinate. Knowing that the upward relationship is the one that predicts job satisfaction, and the downward relationship does not, the middle manager would prioritize one over the other. In the case of Abraham, he chose the direction of God over the life of his own son. While out of context it may sound cold, the purpose of a manager building a higher quality downward relationship appears to be the returned improvement of performance. This performance subsequently is reflected toward the middle manager's own supervisor as a demonstration

of the manager's ability to lead a team and obtain results, while simultaneously being the return on investment for the top-level leader's LMX with the middle manager.

This is largely where the similarity between the Biblical and secular versions of LMX ends. The dynamic between God and man is not the same as the relationship between leader and follower in a job setting. There is an economical nature to the relationship in the workplace, where leaders exchange trust and respect with the expectation that it will result in increased effort and performance. This expectation of a return does not exist in the Bible's description of relationships. God commands that we "love one another as I have loved you" (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, John 15:12), which suggests that interpersonal relationships are inherently altruistic in design. While job satisfaction of the leader may not be derived from their leader-member relationship, these connections still bring value beyond increased performance, commitment, or other organizational metrics. Social support itself has been shown to improve job satisfaction (Sigursteinsdottir, & Karlsdottir, 2022), suggesting when leaders cultivate a positive social environment, they likely are receiving benefits that may not be realized in the MSQ-SF.

## Implications

### Theoretical Implications

This study provides new insight into the LMX theory and the characteristics of the exchange itself. High quality LMX has historically been characterized by concepts such as trust and mutual respect, with the parties benefiting from the relationship through increased performance, satisfaction, and lower turnover intention. What this study shows is that the outcomes of the exchange are not reciprocal across the two parties. While the

foundation of the relationship and behavior may align (e.g., both leader and member trusting the other), the measurable benefits as it relates to satisfaction is only seen from the member. The leader may indirectly increase their satisfaction through enhanced team performance, but a direct correlation between the leader's perception of the relationship and job satisfaction was not shown to exist in this study.

The desire for individuals to climb up the social hierarchy is ingrained in our species (Qu et al., 2017). The low reported authority scores and high LMX scores indicate that prestige is likely the preferred methodology for advancement in this particular setting. In Van Vugt and Smith's (2019) evolutionary perspective of leadership and hierarchies, they note the relatively low rate of dominance-style leadership in small-scale hierarchies and disproportionate influence that leaders have. This sense of established organizational status leads to the emphasis of the upward relationship by individuals in their perception of job satisfaction. In other words, the determination of good standing with individuals of power is, evolutionarily speaking, more likely to lead to one's own advancement. This discussion of social hierarchies ties directly into the role that individuals play in these structures. Based on the results of this study, some inferences can be made as to how these individuals perceive themselves as they navigate the *middle* of the hierarchical ladder.

### *LMX and Role Theory*

The findings of this study suggest that, when it comes to satisfaction, the role of member trumps that of a leader. The data showed the outcomes of relationships from a leader perspective do not manifest themselves in the same manner as the outcomes from the follower perspective. While Falls and Allen (2020) found middle managers will often

identify more as a leader than a follower, the perception of effective relationship building as a leader did not significantly correlate with overall job satisfaction or with any of the facets of job satisfaction measured by the MSQ-SF (Weiss et al., 1967). This aligns with the common beliefs that individuals orient and position themselves for upward mobility in social hierarchies (Cummins, 1996) and those members want to have more access to the resources that their own leader provides (Salehzadeh, 2020). Just because a middle manager more readily identifies as a leader, the reality of being a follower still strongly influences their perceptions of the role.

As discussed in previous chapters, the manager's job satisfaction is heavily influenced by organizational support and communication (Chen et al., 2020; Doleman et al., 2020; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Lu et al., 2016). The findings of this study suggest that this support leading to improved job satisfaction does come via middle managers' leaders. This is evident from the positive predictive relationship between satisfaction and LLX and, comparatively, the lack of any significant relationship between LMX and job satisfaction (or any of its measured facets; see Appendix H). In order to maximize their own job satisfaction, the LMX relationship is likely utilized by the middle manager to strengthen the LLX dyad. The middle manager takes on the umbrella-protector role (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2019), works to increase the LMX relationship in order to demonstrate their own capability, and attempts to use those outcomes to subsequently improve LLX. There was a slight negative correlation between LMX and the satisfaction facet of recognition, possibly suggesting leaders feel inadequately recognized for their ability to develop strong quality relationships with their subordinates. In support of the findings of Bernerth and Hirschfeld (2016), LMXD did seem to influence job satisfaction

score. While Bernerth and Hirschfeld (2016) looked internally at teams and highlighted the need to minimize the differences in quality between relationships, this study would similarly suggest that finding the balance in role as both a leader and member is ideal for increased overall job satisfaction.

### The Importance of Resources in LMX.

It was posited that the inherent desire to gain and conserve resources would act as a primary motivation for individuals to focus on their upward relationships. Farooq and Tripathi (2021) discuss how low quality LLX inhibits the access of a middle manager to resources that they can reallocate. This study does not observe how resources overall are reallocated but can be used as supplementary evidence to support this thought. The LLX and LMX were positively correlated, suggesting that increased quality in one relationship may provide necessary resources to grow another.

Conversely, this study also showed many middle managers feel they are able to foster high quality relationships with their subordinates despite a potential lack of social resources they receive from their supervisor. Middle managers are seemingly able to compartmentalize the two relationships and act in the umbrella-protector role that Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) outlined in their research. Therefore, this study could be used as further evidence that many middle managers do, in some capacity, feel as though they are acting as a buffer, separating the outcomes of their own LLX relationship, and developing the LMX relationship. Overall, it appears the conservation of resources theory may play a role in LMX but may not be a foundational theory as previously believed.

## Practical Implications

The LMX has often been reviewed in a vacuum, isolating a leader and

disregarding where they sit within the larger organizational hierarchy. This study leads to two new understandings that can be applied to middle managers in organizations: middle managers derive a good deal of work satisfaction from their relationship with their leader, and mechanisms should be put in place to provide a full range of feedback to middle managers.

Top management must continue to find the time to develop and maintain a high-quality relationship with middle managers. Yii Tang et al. (2013) discussed leadership derailment and outlined the five factors of derailment: (1) does not relate well to others (2) self-centeredness, (3) doesn't inspire or build talent, (4) too narrow, and (5) doesn't deliver results. Their study found derailment factors were more prevalent in higher management positions. This suggests that leaders higher in the hierarchy display the factors of derailment more frequently, which may be why LMX scores are lower when middle managers rate the relationship with their supervisors. This would lead to an increased need for continual training and education of top management in how to best manage and cultivate relationships with their followers despite the rise in organizational status (and potentially increased responsibilities). Top level organizational leaders need to recognize the influence they hold over the job satisfaction of their subordinates. This is likely true regardless of level within the organization. The correlation between LMX and LLX ($r = .295$) was strong enough for leaders to be wary of exponentially growing discontent in teams. If the LLX between a top leader and middle manager is poor, the subsequent downward relationships are also more likely to be of low quality. In organizational structures which contain multiple layers of management between a senior leader and individual contributor, the impact and spread of one poor relationship at the

top can be magnified.

Yii Tang et al. (2013) also found that, when using 360-degree feedback, the self was the least accurate perspective for ratings. As discussed in the findings, middle managers were much more consistent and elevated in the rating of their own ability to develop high-quality relationships. The implementation of a 360-degree feedback system in which the self, supervisor, co-workers, and employees provide feedback to the middle manager could help create a more realistic picture of expectations and performance for the middle manager. Gregory et al. (2017) also highlight the notion that 360-degree feedback is linked to several positive outcomes, and that employees perform better and are more satisfied when their perceptions align with their leaders. Effectively, if accurate ratings of manager performance relating to relationship building is desired, the subordinates themselves must contribute to the ratings. Dulebohn et al. (2012) suggested that current LMX assessments, when completed by the leader, may be often conflated with a self-rating assessment. For managers to get a real pulse on their own competencies and how they are perceived, both their rating, their leader's rating, and subordinate's rating should be considered.

## Limitations

As previously stated, this study provides insight into how LMX can predict job satisfaction but does not demonstrate causality or direction of the relationship. It is possible that benefits of increased trust, respect, and likability of one's supervisor may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction. Conversely, it is also possible that when one is satisfied with their job, the positive sentiment is attributed to a manager, increasing the likelihood of positive interactions and LMX. While this study supports the notion of a

strong relationship between the two, it is limited in scope beyond that claim.

An additional limitation that arose from the data is the disproportionate number of high and very high LMX ratings when compared to LLX ratings. All managers rated their relationship quality with their subordinate as high or very high. This limits the ability to explore the impact that very low, low, or even moderate ratings might have. Revisiting the findings of Bernerth and Hirschfeld (2016), manager well-being was higher when LMXD was low. This study looked to explore how these findings would manifest themselves if applied between organizational levels. For instance, would satisfaction be higher for a middle manager with low LMX and LLX if they perceived the relationships to be of the same quality, compared to a manager with similarly low, but incongruent, LMX and LLX scores? While the data demonstrates the negligible influence of LMX on the leader's job satisfaction, all results are viewed through the benchmark that the relationship with subordinates is of higher quality, eliminating the opportunity to investigate the importance of congruence in relationship quality at low levels.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) highlights the dynamic nature of interpersonal relationships, and this study takes that first step into making LMX more reflective of life within a social network. Premru et al. (2022) suggested the use of social network analysis could enable researchers to see the interconnectedness that exists within organizational structures and allow for a better examination of the LMX building process. The use of social network analysis has proven useful for identifying organizational pathologies (Cardoso Castro & Espinosa, 2020). In a similar vein to this study, once networks and dyadic relationships are recognized, the quality of those relationships can

be measured, monitored, and analyzed to determine which relationships within an organization influence individuals' workplace attitudes. This study demonstrated that managers, to some degree, can shield their subordinates from poor quality relationships with their own leader. The expansion of understanding as it relates to the hierarchical relationships and social networks in the workplace should continue to be a focus of research going forward. This is equally true when looking at the importance of relationships for those at the very top of the organizational hierarchy. Entrepreneurs with small teams and minimal oversight may only have one direction of dyadic relationships. Further research into that particular subset of organizational and business leaders may highlight whether and how LMX takes on a more important role when LLX is not a factor.

As discussed earlier, there is an increased focus being placed on negative behaviors as it relates to LMX. This can include the impact of abusive supervision, burnout, and work conflict (Premru et al., 2022). While concepts such as upwards bullying have become generally accepted (Busby et al., 2022), there is little research dedicated to understanding how poor leader-member relationships can truly impact the well-being, job satisfaction, and behaviors of leaders. This study was able to support previous findings related to negative outcomes associated with poor quality LMX, but the lack of low middle manager-subordinate ratings limits the ability to analyze the impact of these types of relationships. Conducting a similar study on a larger scale should either increase the likelihood of finding these exceptional cases, or it could also further demonstrate the unwillingness of middle managers to recognize their own relational short fallings.

There has been a continual and repeated call for a longitudinal study on LMX (Dulebohn et al., 2012). A longitudinal and qualitative study could be extremely useful in identifying key aspects to the development of LMX, as well as clarify the directional relationship of some major factors relating to LMX and other variables. For instance, a primary limitation of this study was the inability to recognize if LMX leads to improved satisfaction or vice versa. The inclusion of longitudinal studies, or even a case study in which a new leader is observed as they develop relationships with their subordinates, should be considered in the future.

## Summary

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory continues to be one of the more popular leadership theories in industrial/organizational psychology research. With this has come new critiques and scrutiny regarding its ability to contribute to the advancement of the leadership field (Gottfredson et al., 2020). The next step must be to utilize the conceptual strengths of this theory and expand it beyond the singular dyad and into the real-world of social networks and organizational hierarchy. This study has taken the next step in understanding leader-member dynamics in the workplace, and specifically how middle managers perceive their bi-directional relationships. As researchers better recognize how LMX develops, relationships can be better leveraged and targeted by organizational leaders to cultivate an environment of trusting and respectful relationships from the top down.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITING INFORMATION

**Permission Request Email**

Good afternoon,

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an Industrial/Organizational Psychology PhD degree. The title of my research project is "Bidirectional leader-member exchange and the impact on middle manager job satisfaction," and the purpose of my research is to investigate how a middle manager's work relationships impact their perceived job satisfaction. The study is aimed at improving our understanding of how leader-member relationships influence workplace attitudes, but also more practically, how leaders can leverage their influence in relationship development to improve the lives and job satisfaction of their people.

I am writing to request your permission to contact middle managers (individuals with lead, supervisor, manager, or director in their title) at your organization to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete a brief and anonymous survey. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Brian Collera

**Recruitment Email**

Good morning,

As a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand how relationships impact job satisfaction of organizational managers. The purpose of my research is to apply the leader-member exchange theory to more realistic organizational structures. Unlike other leadership theories (e.g., transformational, transactional, etc.), the leader-member exchange focusses directly on the relationship between a leader and follower. Little is known about how this theory applies to individuals who hold both leader and member roles, and how these different relationships may be predictive of job satisfaction. Therefore, I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To participate as a Public Sector employee, you must be a Principal, Assistant Principal, or Department Lead in a public school in the state of Florida. To participate as a Private Sector employee, you must be an exempt, full-time employee working in the United States (either at the organization headquarters or remotely in the United States), hold a position with the title of lead, supervisor, manager, or director, and manage or supervise at least one employee. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a brief online survey, which should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey will be anonymous, and no personally identifiable information will be collected.

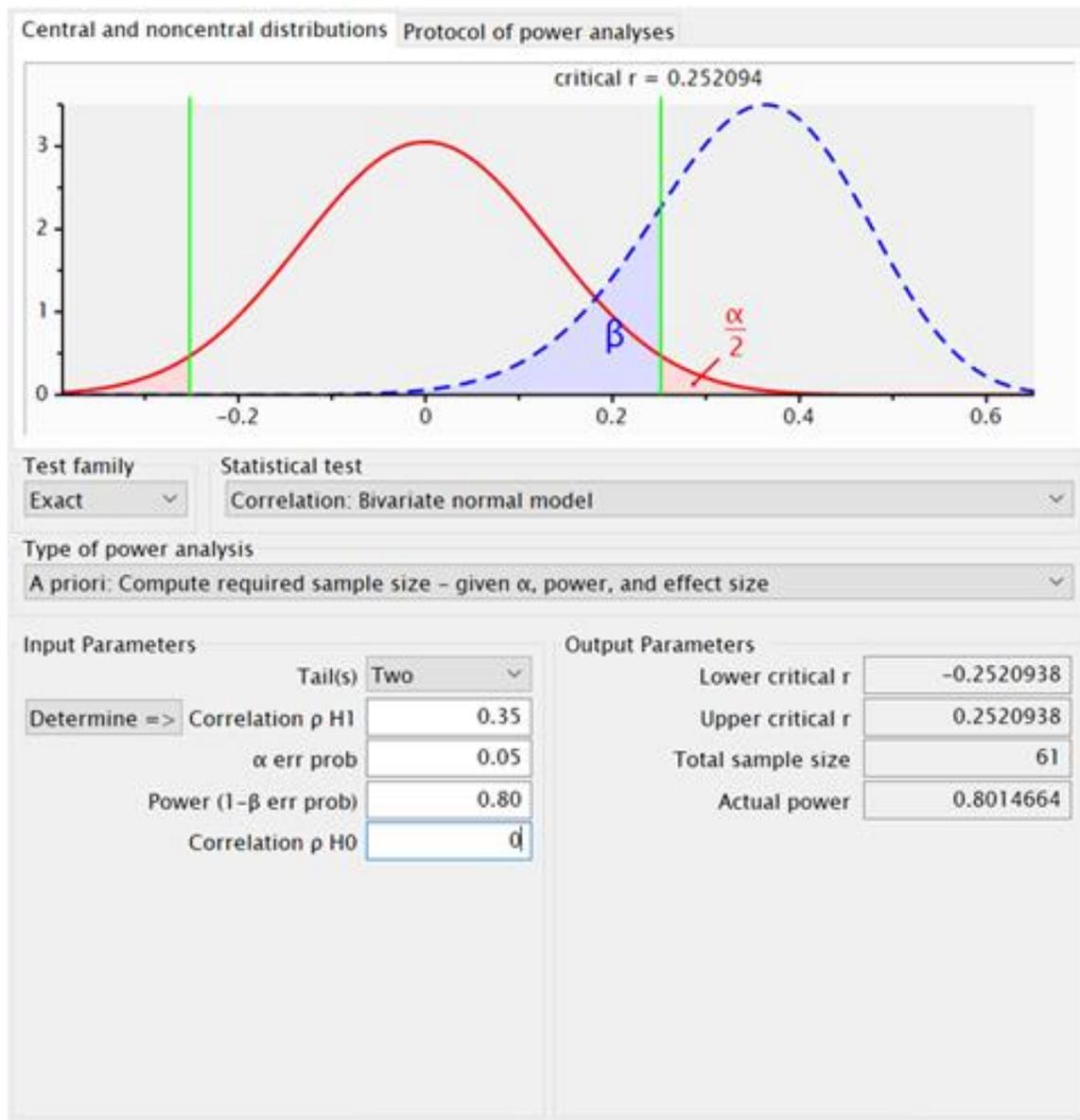To participate, please follow this link: ████████████████████████████

An informed consent document is attached to this email. This consent form will be used for the entirety of the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Acknowledgement and understanding of the consent form will occur when responding "Yes" to the first question of the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and agree to take part in the survey.

Survey Link: ██████████████████████████

Thank you for your participation!

Brian Collera

APPENDIX B: POWER ANALYSIS

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

**Title of the Project:** Bi-directional leader-member exchange and the impact on middle manager job satisfaction
**Principal Investigator:** Brian Collera, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate as a Public Sector employee, you must be a Principal, Assistant Principal, or Department Lead in a public school in the state of Florida. To participate as a Private Sector employee, you must be an exempt, full-time employee working in the United States (either at the organization headquarters or remotely in the United States), hold a position with the title of lead, supervisor, manager, or director, and manage or supervise at least one employee. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate how the relationships a mid-level leader maintains with both their subordinates and direct supervisor are associated with subjective job satisfaction. This study is exploring the unique position that mid-level management has as both a leader and follower in the larger organization. This study also seeks to expand the understanding and application of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete an anonymous online survey. The entire survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of relationship dynamics on the job satisfaction of organizational managers and leaders.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
- Participant responses will be anonymous.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and will be deleted after three years.

**Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?**

The researcher serves as a human resources partner at Fanatics. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the study will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Brian Collera. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Rebecca Lindsey, at ███████████████.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

*Selecting "Yes" to the first question of the survey constitutes your consent to participate in the study.*

# APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions, choosing the most accurate response.

1. Which sector is your current job:     Private          Public

2. How would you describe your wor setting:    Corporate Office       Other

3. Gender:

| Male | Female | Transgender | Gender Non-comforming | Decline to Answer |

4. Ethnicity:

| American Indian or Alaskan Native | Asian or Pacific Islander | Black | Hispanic | White |

5. Please select highest level of education attained:

| High School or Equivalent | Some College Coursework Completed | Associate's Degree | Bachelor's Degree | Post Graduate |

6. Tenure in current role:

| 0-2 Years | 3-5 Years | 5-10 Years | 10-20 Years | 20+ Years |

APPENDIX E: LMX-7

Source: Graen and Uhl-Blen (1995). Reproduced with permission of Elsevier.

In the following set of questions, think of your immediate supervisor [The person who rates your performance].

1. Do you know where you stand with your leader . . do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?

      Rarely     Occasionally     Sometimes     Fairly Often     Often

2. How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?

  Not a Bit     A Little     A Fair Amount     Quite a Bit     A Great Deal

3. How well does your leader recognize your potential?

Not at All     A Little     Moderately     Mostly     Fully

4. Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/ her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/ her power to help you solve problems in your work?

None     Small     Moderate     High     Very High

5. Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he/ she would "bail you out," at his/ her expense?

None     Small     Moderate     High     Very High

6. I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/ her decision if he/she were not present to do so?

Strongly Disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

7. How would you characterize your working reltionship with your leader?

Extremely Ineffective     Worse than Average     Average     Better than Average     Extremely Effective

APPENDIX F: SLMX-7

Source: Graen and Uhl-Blen (1995). Reproduced with permission of Elsevier.

In the following set of questions, think of your direct reports, and answer considering the

average, or typical score would be.

1.  Does your member usually know where they stand with you . . do they usually
    know how satisfied you are with what they do?

> Rarely        Occasionally        Sometimes        Fairly Often        Often

2.  How well do you understand your member's job problems and needs?

> Not a Bit        A Little        A Fair Amount        Quite a Bit        A Great Deal

3.  How well do you recognize your member's potential?

> Not at All        A Little        Moderately        Mostly        Fully

4.  Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/ her position,
    what are the chances that you would use your power to help your member solve
    problems in their work?

> None        Small        Moderate        High        Very High

5.  What are the chances that you would "bail out your member," at your expense?

> None        Small        Moderate        High        Very High

6.  Your member has enough confidence in you that they would defend and justify
    your decision if you were not present to do so?

> Strongly Disagree        Disagree        Neutral        Agree        Strongly Agree

7.  How would you characterize your working reltionship with your member?

> Extremely        Worse than        Average        Better than        Extremely
> Ineffective        Average                Average        Effective

APPENDIX G: MINNESOTA SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE – SHORT FORM

Reproduced with permission of Vocational Psychology Research, University of Minnesota.

**Instructions**: The purpose of this questionnaire is to give you a chance to tell how you feel about your present iob, what things you are satisfied with and what things you are not satisfied with. Please use the below scale, and ask yourself:

**On my present job, this is how I feel about**

| Very Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied | Satisfied | Very Satisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. Being able to keep busy all the time

2. The chance to work alone on the job

3. The chance to do different things from time to time

4. The chance to be "somebody" in the community

5. The way my boss handles his/her workers

6. The competence of my supervisor in making decisions

7. Being able to do things that don't go against my conscience

8. The way my job provides for steady employment

9. The chance to do things for other people

10. The chance to tell people what to do

11. The chance to do something that makes use of my abilities

12. The way company policies are put into practice

13. My pay and the amount of work I do

14. The chances for advancement on this job

15. The freedom to use my own judgment

16. The chance to try my own methods of doing the job

17. The working conditions

18. The way my co-workers get along with each other

19. The praise I get for doing a good job

20. The feeling of accomplishment I get from the job

APPENDIX H: CORRELATIONS OF JOB SATISFACTION FACETS AND LLX,

LMX, AND LMX DIFFERENTIATION

| Satisfaction Facet | LLX | LMX | LMX Differentiation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Satisfaction | .708** | .073 | -.693** |
| Activity | .245** | .036 | -.235 |
| Independence | .243* | .032 | -.235 |
| Variety | .210 | .063 | -.186 |
| Social Status | .488** | -.041 | -.522* |
| Supervision (Human Resources) | .803** | .149 | -.754 |
| Supervision (Technical) | .690** | .060 | -.681 |
| Moral Values | .289* | .123 | -.238 |
| Security | .141 | .108 | -.092 |
| Social Service | .254* | .152 | .188 |
| Authority | .088 | .059 | -.062 |
| Ability Utilization | .531** | .065 | -.514** |
| Company Policies | .492** | .055 | -.480* |
| Compensation | .547** | -.002 | -.564* |
| Advancement | .587** | -.047 | -.626** |
| Responsibility | .513** | .024 | -.516** |
| Creativity | .571** | .072 | -.522** |
| Working Conditions | .420** | .223 | -.324** |
| Co-Workers | .311* | .010 | -.315** |
| Recognition | .540* | -.106 | -.607** |
| Achievement | .389** | -.050 | -.424** |