

MASTER'S THESIS

An in-depth examination of leader-member exchange in Chinese organizations using the LMX-Comm model

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Date of Award:
2020

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ABSTRACT

Volumes of empirical studies have focused on leader-member exchange (LMX) theory since its inception. Few qualitative studies have investigated LMX behavior in the context of Chinese organizations. To address this gap in literature, an in-depth examination of LMX behaviors was conducted, adopting the four-dimensional LMX-Comm model. The study focused on the communication topics, tangible behaviors, and communication channels present in leader-member mutual interactions. Eleven small group interviews with three employees from organizations in ten cities were conducted. Through thematic analysis of the interview data, this study examined LMX behaviors and communication channels. Themes were investigated according to the four LMX dimensions: work communication exchange, social communication exchange, tangible work exchange, and tangible social exchange. Several work communication exchange themes emerged from the data, including performance discussion, and decision-making involvement. In the social communication dimension, topics related to family, friends, asset management, entertainment activities, and hobbies were identified. Tangible work exchange behaviors were found in leader-member interactions, such as mutual helping behavior and compensatory time-off for overtime work. Participating in social and entertainment activities, exchanging gifts and red envelopes, and helping one another with personal matters, were also identified as tangible social exchange themes. Negative topics in communication exchange, including gossips and complaints, emerged from the data. In addition to LMX, several one-way behaviors, such as helping subordinates to map out a career plan, also were identified, contributing to a clearer understanding of the leader-member relationship. Additionally, this study looked at the communication

channels used by the leader–member dyad. Social media and face-to-face communication were found to be the most frequently used communication channels. The findings of this study can be applied to leadership training and be used to guide future scale development and other quantitative studies surrounding the construct of LMX.

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